2018

OLDER ADULT MEN'S EMOTIONAL BONDS WITH THEIR DOGS

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Digital Object Identifier: https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2018.268

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OLDER ADULT MEN'S EMOTIONAL BONDS WITH THEIR DOGS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Public Health at the University of Kentucky

By
Ranell Layne Mueller

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Graham Rowles, Professor of Gerontology

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2018

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

OLDER ADULT MEN'S EMOTIONAL BONDS WITH THEIR DOGS

Knowledge of the deeper meanings of attachment to companion animals is limited, particularly in terms of older adults. This study employed a modified grounded theory method, a phenomenological lens and a life course perspective to gather and analyze data garnered from individual interviews and panel discussions in order to investigate the multiple dimensions of older adult men's relationships with their companion animal dogs. Individual audio-recorded in-depth interviews and repeated panel discussions with a sub-group of the participants, convened as a panel over a three-month period, explored behavioral and emotional manifestations of attachment and the emotional bond to their companion animal dogs and the changing nature of that attachment and bond over their life span. Analysis involved open, axial and selective coding of transcripts to reveal underlying patterns within the data. Outcomes included movement toward a theory of companion animal attachment for older adult men as well as insight into the role of dogs in development of older adult men's identities. This dissertation offers insight into the deeper understanding of the human-animal bond resulting in enhancing quality of life for both older adult male pet owners and their companion animal dogs.

Keywords: dogs, older adults, men, attachment, human-animal bond

Ranell Layne Mueller

6/25/2018

Date

OLDER ADULT MEN'S EMOTIONAL BONDS WITH THEIR DOGS

By

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__Graham. D. Rowles, PhD._____
Director of Dissertation

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__ _____6/25/2018_____

DEDICATION

While this dissertation is about men and their dogs, it should come as no surprise to anyone who knows me well that I am dedicating this dissertation to my cat, Bug, who passed away on April 4th, 2016 from cancer. He died in my arms and took a part of me with him—a part of me I shall never desire be returned to me for it is in the safest of keeping. There never will be another four-legged furry friend with whom I will share my soul so openly, thoroughly and unabashedly authentic. You, my dear, are the love of my life. I will always mourn your early departure from this world, but I look forward to the day when we are reunited once again and I can hold you in my arms as you hug me around my neck, your head resting under my chin, and I regale you with stories of the rest of my life for which I wish you had been present. Please wait patiently for me and do not forget me, the one who loves you the most, from the second you jumped onto my lap and we both found a home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation did not just happen, and it is not only four years of work, but one effect of an accumulation of 11 years of education, countless life experiences, and relationships with others. I begin by acknowledging those relationships.

Steve (Mr. Bogart). I know you will laugh at that. There is not a doubt in my mind that if not for you I would not be writing this at the beginning of my dissertation. You believed in me when I did not believe in myself. You have been a constant and valuable friend and will be until we die. And yes, my mathematician friend, you will understand my dissertation (you know, when you retire and have time to read it).

Amanda, my quirky, nutball of a friend. I have not seen you in over five years, but I feel closer to you than ever. You have been the most determining factor in my acceptance of myself and for that, dear, and your constant encouragement, I thank you.

Travis, my husband and friend: You poor man, you have been by my side these past four years and have, seemingly, survived it. You were more than "The IT guy" through this, even though you saved my sanity by helping me with formatting this dissertation. You allowed me to cry, vent, and laugh through this process. You deserve this just as much, if not more than I. How will I ever repay you?

Thank you to my parents for motivating me to seek education and accepting the many journeys I have experienced (dad, I'm alive, let it go….). Maybe someday I will come home, but for now, there are a few more things I need to do.

To my three kitties at home; Newky, Miss Chubkins and Remi. You have sustained me. Chubs, I'm sorry we lost Bug, he was your brother and I know you miss him as I do. You are my baby girl, and I love you for sleeping on my head all these years and carrying your sock babies around. I love you baby girl. Newky, your constant meows keep me wondering what you are thinking. You are the newest addition to our family and I think you are still finding your way. Know that I love your super fluffs. I hope you appreciate my pillow. Remi, you creep me out sometimes, when you stare at me like you see through me. You have the most pathetic little meow I have ever heard, but I hope to hear it for many years. I love you my soft, fluffy boy. You have all helped me maintain my sanity simply by being there, stealing my pillow, pushing me out of bed, and cuddling with me every day and every night. I love you all more than I can say.

I would like to thank my two favorite baristas in all the land-Ethan and Jamie, for providing me with many, many chai tea lattes during the hours I spent at your Starbucks while writing this dissertation. Your dedication to the perfecting of my drink sustained me throughout a mentally and emotionally strenuous and draining process.

And finally, to my committee members;

Dr. Graham Rowles; I do hope you are still mentally sound after getting me through this. I think I kept you on your toes and perhaps I influenced you to adopt a dog in your new retirement. Your constant support and encouragement throughout the past four years sustained me through some difficult times. Your mentorship has been something I have never before experienced, but greatly appreciate. I will look back on this process fondly, as I hope you do. Thank you, Graham.

Dr. John Watkins; it has been said that you and I are like "oil and water" and we are in many ways. I admit that no one confuses me quite like you do, but in many attempts to reduce that confusion I have found clarity and new directions toward which to focus my thinking. You have taught me how to be a scholar, perhaps the most precious gift I have been given.

Dr. Beth Hunter; you were the one who influenced me to study the human animal bond in gerontology. I will be dedicating the rest of my professional career to this area of inquiry and for that I am so grateful. I will never be bored again.

Dr. Robert Mitchell; I feel as though we will be good friends from here on out. Your expertise and ability to communicate with me are astounding. I feel your support of my work carried me through this process and your expertise kept me questioning what I thought I knew. You are my human-animal bond guru and I thank you.

Dr. Lee Blonder; your positivity toward my writing and research always gave me hope that I was working on something worthwhile and intriguing. I sincerely hope you enjoy your time spent with your dogs and that this dissertation influences you to ask yourself some fun questions regarding your relationship with them.

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Prologue:

> "I remember one night when there was an absolutely clear sky, a cloudless night. We live in an area when people have their lights off you can see the stars. We had just had our driveway paved a few weeks before, it was nice and smooth, and the big dog and I went out and we laid down on the driveway, and just stared at the stars. And this humongous dog just snuggled up with me, put her head in the curve of my arm and we laid there for half an hour, it was the first time I remember since childhood really spending quality time with a dog. And by that time all the kids were gone and we didn't have grandkids yet, and if we did, they were very young and we didn't play with them much, at least not as much as now, but anyway, about 15 or 16 years ago was sort of when I had an awakening toward our companion animals and really started feeling close to them and they react of course when you show them affection, they give it back. So, once we hit 50 to 55 we were starting to think about retirement and so forth, the kids are gone. They (companion animals) fill a void really."

The manner in which James, a participant in this dissertation research, speaks of his "awakening" toward his companion animals may indicate to the reader of his story that James was experiencing a moment of introspection and contentedness, and perhaps emotions such as feelings of attachment and togetherness while lying on the pavement with his dog. This event was transformative for James as he vividly remembers an interaction he experienced with his dog that occurred approximately 15 years ago. His detail of the sky, the stars, and his newly paved driveway make it easy to visualize the context in which he "snuggled" with his dog that night. He offered no name or breed for this dog and perhaps that was not as important to him as was relaying the importance of the dog's presence in his "awakening." He briefly mentions the reciprocity of affection shown between himself and his dog, that I argue drew him emotionally closer to that dog and, as will become clear, his current dogs.

James' story is unique to James and a particular dog at a time in his life when he and his wife were thinking about retirement and spending time with their grandchildren.

The trajectory and significance of James' bond with dogs is personal to him and has been affected by the events in his life, transitions he has experienced, and his ways of thinking about those events and transitions. Interactions, such as the one James experienced with this dog lying on pavement under the stars, led to an attachment toward companion animal which is the essence of an emotional bond. This story expresses James' feelings of personal transformation, a change in his thinking about relationships with dogs and the beginnings of a new definition of self as an older adult dog owner. James' story, along with many others', speaks to the core of this dissertation.

Chapter One: Introduction

"When the Man Waked up he said, 'What is Wild Dog doing here?' And the Woman said, 'His name is not Wild Dog anymore, but the First Friend, because he will be our friend for always and always and always.'"

Rudyard Kipling (author, The Jungle Book)

The bond between humans and animals has existed in one form or another for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence that manifests the interaction of human-animal and non-human animal interaction dates back more than 35,000 years. Paintings in cave dwellings in France depict hunting behaviors of humans toward available prey, and burial sites in Israel include humans being buried with their dogs (Clutton-Brock, 1969; Zorich, 2012). Domestic dogs of the present day descended from a line of pre-domesticated canines that influenced human's earliest bond with an animal. Dogs were kept close to humans in early settlements for companionship and for food scrap disposal. Cats were kept in India as companion animals as evidenced by the cats' burial methods which were usually reserved for humans (Allchin, 1969). It was forbidden to kill a cat in Egypt even in war. Documents tell of King Cambyses using cats as an offensive technique with which to overcome the Egyptian army by covering his Persian soldiers with live cats, knowing that the Egyptians would not kill the cats and would therefore be defenseless (Kalof, 2007, pp. 5). While human interactions with animals have been recorded in cave art and human burial rituals throughout the past 35,000 years, modern research looking at the interaction did not begin until the 1800's and, even then, this research was purely medical in nature (Tuke, 1813).

The idea of a human-animal bond (HAB) predicated on attachment, emotions and genetics was first introduced by Konrad Lorenz in the 1930's. His observations of geese's innate behavior to imprint on its biological mother and therefore from a bond with her led to his original concept of imprinting. Fifty years later a pioneer in the HAB community, Leo Bustad, coined the term "human-animal bond," which is still utilized by the research community today (Hines, 2003). This bond refers to the emotional connection experienced between a person and an animal they choose to keep as a companion animal (Julius, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, & Uvnas-Moberg, 2012). Researchers in the 1980's attempted to explain how people benefited from the HAB by looking at health factors including how the bond alleviated depression and reduced anxiety (Brickel, 1984). More recently, such perspectives as sociology, ethology and psychology have offered significant insight to the intricacies of the HAB in an attempt to discern why and how humans benefit from this bond. Contributions have explored the physiological, psychological, and physical effects of companion animals on people and have found the HAB to be beneficial to both human and non-human animal health (Julius et al., 2012; Cutt, Giles-Corti, Knuiman, & Burke, 2007; Mitchell & Sinkhorn, 2014).

Problem and Research Question

Measures and Meaning of Attachment

Literature that attempts to explain the HAB speaks of the attachment companion animal owners form with their companion animals as a means to explain the physical and mental benefits they glean from the emotional bond that is born from that attachment (Freidmann & Thomas, 1985; Headey, 1999; McNicholas et al., 2005). Measures of attachment have been developed and utilized in an attempt to measure the strength of

attachment to a companion animal (Johnson, Garrity, & Stallones, 1992), and clarification of the differences in that strength based on the type of companion animal to which one may become attached (Zasloff, 1996). Attachment was and is currently defined depending on the context in which purpose attachment serves. Bowlby's Attachment Theory began to gain recognition in the 1970's but an operational definition of attachment remained elusive due to its naturalistic observational methods rooted in evolutionary attachment measures (Cohen, 1974). Attachment as a construct has been defined as a mechanism primarily with which to serve a purpose in two contexts; that of physical survival as an infant learns its parent are a reliable source of resources and safety (Benoit, 2004; Goldberg, Grusec, & Jenkins, 1999), and that of a source of mental and social survival as the infant learns social skills from its parents that are needed to navigate complex relationships in individual social contexts. The simplest definition of attachment without regard to context is "an affectionate regard" for another (Merriam Webster, 2018a). If the simplest definition of attachment is "an affectionate regard" then what purpose does this regard serve for the older adult companion animal owner who does not need the companion animal for biological safety and nurturing, as companion animals are kept today simply for companionship? Does attachment to a companion animal change as a result of one's life course? What is the process of how one develops an attachment and a bond for a companion animal? These are questions that need to be addressed in order to fully understand the meaning of attachment and its effects on those who choose to care for them.

Utilization of Attachment Theory

Bowlby's Theory of Attachment (1969) was just that--a theory. It wasn't until he teamed up with Ainsworth in the 1970's that she operationalized his ideas. Still referred to as Attachment Theory, it is the most frequently utilized theoretical framework to explain the tenacity of attachment. I have two primary concerns with this theory being used in the human-animal bond context; first, this theory was originally developed to explain attachment between a human caregiver and their infant children, not a human caregiver and their companion animal (Bowlby, 1969). The theory has been more broadly utilized to include studies of "a specific relationship—that between a person and his most intimate companion" (Cohen, 1974. pg. 207). Using this inclusion, the intimate companion does not necessarily need to be another human but could include a non-human animal companion. Another concern with this model is that it is a maternally focused theory (Sandbrook & Adamson-Macedo, 2004), and therefore does not apply to the ways in which men become attached to their companion animals nor does it explain the significance of this attachment for them. While this attachment perspective has furthered research in the field and added to the understanding of how people and animals benefit from attachment, there is one area that attachment research has done little to explore. We know little about the deeper and personal meaning of the essence of attachment to companion animals from the perspective of older adult male companion animal owners and even less about how older adult men develop attachments and bonds with their chosen companion animals.

Implications of Attachment for Older Adults

The presence of a companion animal in later life may be especially important to the owner as a constant companion in what is often a time in life that is wrought with change and loss (Field & Minkler, 1988). Research looking at older adult male companion animal owners may reveal how attachment to a companion animal changes over their life span and if companion animals are especially supportive in older age as some research suggests (Parslow, Jorm, Christensen, Rodgers, & Jacomb, 2005; Raina, Waltner-Toews, Bonnett, Woodward, & Abernathy, 1999). A life course perspective (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003) examining companion animal ownership will assist in understanding how the changes and transitions a male companion animal owner experiences over their life span affects their levels of attachment to their current companion animal and the meaning of that attachment in old age.

Filling in the Gaps

It is well documented that attachment is a critical component of the relationship between a person and their companion animal and is the deciding factor in a companion animal owner developing an emotional bond with that animal (Smolkovic, Fajfar, & Mlinaric, 2012; Stallones, Marx, Garrity, & Johnson, 1990). Unfortunately, the literature provides limited insight into the deeper meaning of attachment and its implications for the well-being and quality of life of older adult companion animal owners. Literature heavily relies on Bowlby's attachment theory to explain the benefits of the bond to humans (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). Also lacking is clear definition of how attachment occurs and changes over the life span of a companion animal owner as a result of their life course. How does attachment develop

into an emotional bond? Another gap in the literature is a lack of self-reported reflections of the meaning of the bond from older adult male companion animal owners. In-depth examination of the meaning of attachment for older adult male companion animal owners will facilitate movement toward development of a theory of the HAB for older adults.

The HAB is not a new area of inquiry, but it is beginning to spur an intense curiosity among those interested in understanding the complexities of humans' relationships with companion animals. One result of research into the HAB is that it is now known that this relationship is dynamic and rewarding, but complicated. Interactions with animals range from eating them for breakfast, lunch and dinner, to carrying them around in a purse, to spending billions of dollars a year on their outfits, food, and presents for their birthdays (Herzog, 2010). There are currently more cats in the world than there are dogs, and some cities in the Unites States have more dogs than children. The owners of these millions of dogs and cats, and many other types of companion animals, report verbally telling their companion animals that they love them and feel loved in return (Carlisle-Frank & Frank, 2006; Hens, 2009).

This complicated relationship, especially concerning older adult male companion animal owners, is one that needed further exploring in order to tease out the nuances that are at the root of the meaning behind the progression toward and outcomes of attachment. Given that the population of older adults is steadily increasing and along with them their emotional, psychological, social and health needs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018a; 2018b), the effect of caring for a companion animal on quality of life in old age merits in-depth examination in order to move toward an understanding and ability to address the impact this aging population will have on all societal institutions

that focus on care of older adults. An in-depth qualitative study aimed at understanding the meaning of attachment as explained by older adult male companion animal owners was needed to add personal authenticity and perspective that will enable us to expand the idea of attachment beyond Bowlby's theory and provide the field of the HAB with grounded insight to facilitate progress toward developing its own theory suited to explain the attachment between a human and their companion animal.

Purpose and Aims of the Study

This dissertation explores attachment to companion animal dogs in the later lives of men. The goal is to understand the meaning of attachment toward companion animals in old age in order to move toward developing a theory of the HAB. A life course lens (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003) and phenomenological perspective (Donalek, 2004; Dowling, 2007; Husserl, 1970 as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) are employed in seeking understanding of the current meaning that older adult men ascribe to the attachment they experience for their companion animals. Within this philosophical framework, modified grounded theory methods are utilized to work toward development of a theory of the HAB.

The three specific aims of this study are:

1). to investigate the meaning older adult men ascribe to attachments they form with their companion animal dogs;

2). to examine the relationships between life stage, life course and the progression and outcomes of attachment to companion animal dogs; and,

3). to move toward development of a HAB attachment theory that provides a deeper understanding of the emotional bond between older adult men and their companion animal dogs than is currently available.

Thorough exploration of the process of attachment to companion animals, the meaning of that attachment, and the transformative nature of attachment in the lives of older adult men may enhance our understanding of the effects of companion animal attachment on older adult men's sense of identity in later life.

Outline of Dissertation Chapters

This first chapter has offered insight into the reasoning for pursuing this line of inquiry and how I will explore the research questions through addressing three specific aims. Chapter two begins with a literature review where I place the HAB in historical context and review current literature findings on the bond. The chapter discusses the implications of the HAB for older adults, comments on the lack of men as participants in the literature, describes an original pilot study and presents the motivation for the dissertation study. In chapter three I present the methodology. Chapter four introduces the twelve study participants and their dogs by providing short biographies to situate the reader in the context of the men's lives. Chapters five, six, and seven, summarize manifestations of attachment as revealed by the study participants. The first part of chapter eight describes attachment and the emotional bond from the participant's perspectives. The concluding section of chapter eight presents the logical outcome of the progression of attachment, which is characteristically, an intense emotional bond. Chapter nine explains the constant shifting dynamics of attachment and subsequent bond from a life course perspective. In chapter ten I move toward a theory of older adult men

and their dogs. Finally, in chapter eleven I discuss limitations of the study, consider directions for further research, and present conclusions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Background

This literature review is organized into four sections. First, I ground the HAB relationship in history with a look back to the beginning of what has become a critical relationship in many people's lives. Second, the HAB will be considered from a life course perspective. Third, I clarify how Attachment Theory has been used to explain the bond and the benefits derived from the bond. Fourth, I will review the emotional aspects of the bond that results from attachment to companion animals. I conclude with sections describing the pilot study I conducted that subsequently led me to research the topic area of this dissertation and the implications of the human-animal bond.

Historical Perspective

Humans' relationship with animals has changed in diverse ways including how humans perceive the utility of animals, how humans live with animals and even how humans benefit from animals. The earliest interactions between humans and animals were primarily through hunting and killing animals in order to acquire their power through consuming them and also consuming animals for sustenance and using animal bones and hides for tools, clothing and shelter (Hughes, 2007). The earliest evidence for hunting, dating back two million years, has been found in East Africa in modern day Kenya. This practice pre-dates *Homo sapiens* and indicates that hunting was a common means of providing food for Australopithecus (Rabinovich, Gaudzinski-Windheuser, & Goren-Inbar, 2008). Anthropologists have been able to trace the migratory and extinction patterns of certain species of animals by following their remains left by humans. They have been able to determine which animals were desirable prey, where they were hunted

and when they became extinct while also learning about the methods and intricacies of human hunting practices. Hunting continued as the primary source of food even after agricultural methods of controlled food sources such as livestock and grains was common enough to provide a stable, consistent source of sustenance and materials about 11,000 years ago (Barker, 2009). The earliest known cave paintings depicting the hunting of animals date to 35,000 years ago in Indonesia (Zorich, 2012). Cave paintings of animals have been found on almost all continents. Animals depicted are large animals including bison, oxen, reindeer and aurochs. Humans were not depicted in this art and it is believed that through the drawing of these scenes, humans were hoping for good luck in their hunting through an increased number of animals to be hunted (O'Hara, 2014). Another theory is that Shamans painted these animals in the hope that their connections to a spiritual deity would draw the animals out of hiding and into the hunters' paths (Whitley, 2009). The significance of the interaction with animals for people can be seen in art other than caves. People engraved animals' likeness onto stone, bone, jewelry and pottery. Ptolemy named constellations after animals, not for the constellations' resemblance to the physical animal, but for their symbolic nature (Marshall, 1995).

Some believe that the beginnings of the human-animal bond as modern humans consider it, occurred 15,000 years ago with the domestication of *Canis lupus*, the wolf (Zeder, 2012). Domestication of the wolf predates agriculture practices of keeping livestock including sheep and goats. Domestication is defined as a mutual relationship where one being controls and manipulates the breeding, feeding, distributing and gleaning of materials from another for the purpose of securing a consistent source of food

and materials (Larson & Fuller, 2014). Domestication of the wolf led to the domestic dog that millions of people today keep as a companion animal.

The concept of a "companion animal" has arguably been around for thousands of years. There is mention of domesticated animals possibly being considered as "companion animals" in Egypt and the Levant region 15,000 years ago (Cranstone, 1969). This conjecture is based on burial remains found of humans holding puppies. The domestication of cats is contentious with some claiming the practice began in India and present-day Pakistan, although these cats are far different from what is considered a domestic companion animal cat today as their body sizes, shapes and demeanor had not been altered or bred to fit present day desirable companion animal characteristics (Allchin, 1969). Others claim domesticated cats come from Cyprus where the earliest burial of a cat was found with a human body approximately 9,500 years ago (Vigne et al., 2016). Contemporary pet-keeping did not become common until the 17th and 18th centuries in Great Britain where the social and class implications were vast. At this time, companion animals were kept among the wealthy and were an accessory of the rich and elite. Victorian era companion animals were pampered, coddled, depicted in paintings alongside their owners and were used for hunting and as a companion for those who could afford such extravagance (Amato, 2015). Pedigrees of dogs became important during this time and reflected the status of their owners. Pedigreed dogs were often stolen from their owners and sold for profit to the middle-class. Elizabeth Barrett Browning documented multiple cases of her purebred cocker spaniel being stolen for ransom money (Adams, 2009). The 19th century saw the proliferation of companion animals throughout the classes of Britain that enabled the middle-class to engage with the upper-class.

Companion animals in this regard can be seen as a means to break through established social boundaries as designated by the era.

Today, there are almost 90 million dogs and 74 million cats living in homes in the United States (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2018). According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), dogs and cats are the two most popular types of companion animals followed by birds, horses and other small animals and reptiles (AVMA, 2018). Companion animals have potentially more meaning today than ever before in history. A few reasons for this may be the rising numbers of adults living alone, decreasing numbers of marriages, fewer children per family, and increasing life expectancy (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018c; 2018d). These demographic changes provide the opportunity to invest time, money and energy on a companion animal. Today, in the U.S., companion animal owners spend approximately sixty-billion dollars on companion animals each year (Castillo, 2015). Some would claim this is indulgent behavior, but for those who care for a companion animal, it is normal, expected and even enjoyed (Turner, 2006). The bond between humans and animals has always existed but the commonality and frequency with which this is manifested in pet-keeping has only been a reality for a few hundred years. The changing dynamic of humans' relationship with animals may be due to a few factors.

One factor is humans' proximity to animals as a result of urban living. The consequences of urban living may be two-fold. Keddie (1977) claimed that urban lifestyles removed people from agricultural living, where daily engagement with animals would occur, and placed them in an environment where animals were no longer a necessity of survival. Urban living therefore required a change in perspective regarding

the presence of animals. For instance, in order to interact daily with an animal, a person would purposefully seek one out and if acquired as one's own, it would then become their companion animal. The second factor was change in family structure as a result of mobilization for work security. Historically speaking, families were large and worked the land and dwelled together with multiple generations under one roof. Now as a result of ease of mobility and scattered employment opportunities, families are smaller and more nuclear with the development of more multi-generational families (Keddie, 1977). Keddie argues that fewer human family members present to rely on for emotional support has led individuals to seek out close, emotional connections with animals resulting in millions of homes today keeping companion animals as a substitute for human contact.

Currently what is written about in academic literature is referred to as the human-animal bond (HAB). One could argue that this bond, an emotionally laden relationship between people and animals kept for companion purposes (Julius et al., 2012), was first an interaction between people and animals that was a necessity for survival. People have always represented their interactions with animals through the act of hunting; portraying those interactions symbolically through art; and using of their bodies for food, shelter or weapons. In this context, it is likely that some people did develop a bond with certain animals that were not used in this manner. A consequence of the evolution and development of societies, reduced farming practices, urban lifestyles and mobility, is that people arguably have more energy and resources to focus on meeting their psychological needs for love, companionship, friendship, emotional stability and psychological security through pet-keeping (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Viviers, 2014; Wood, Giles-Corti, Bulsara, & Bosch, 2007).

Life Course

Life course is distinguished here from life span (the years one lives) in that a life course perspective situates these participants in the context in which they have experienced being companion animal owners over their life spans (Elder, 1994; Elder et al., 2003). Life course and life span are different from life stage. A life stage is a specific period in someone's life such as adolescence or older adulthood. Studies of the life course and life cycle must consider the role of companion animals because they function as a member of the family and experience the many changes their family experiences (Turner, 2006). Certain events that take place in life such as marriage, having children, divorce, death of a loved one or family member, relocating, retirement and launching children from the home are events where one may need additional support that can be found in a companion animal (Sable, 1995). The role of the companion animal will often change depending on the life stage of the family or individual. For instance, young adults who have just left home are quite attached to any companion animals they take with them as the young adults are often unmarried with no children (Schvaneveldt, Young, Schvaneveldt, & Kivett, 2001; Turner, 2006). Approximately one-fourth of future parents adopt companion animals as a means to "practice" for child-rearing. After the couple has a human child however, they report a reduced attachment to their companion animal as a result of lack of time for them related to the added responsibility of caring for a human child (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Shir-Vertesh, 2012). Young couples who have a child before they adopt a companion animal are less likely to adopt one due to safety concerns for their child (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Koivusilta & Ojanlatva, 2006).

During later life, companion animals can be especially important. The many events and transitions an older adult has experienced through their life span may contribute to their level of attachment to their current companion animal. Older adults who are divorced, never-married, widowed and who have no children living near report feeling closer to their companion animal (Parslow et al., 2005). The presence of a companion animal in an older person's life contributes to their mental and physical quality of life. Older adults who have a companion animal at home are less likely to see their doctor and report fewer psychologically distressing events (Siegel, 1990). Albert and Bulcroft (1988) found that older adults who had lost a spouse to death scored high on levels of attachment to their companion animal. Older adults experience a multitude of transitions and losses as they age. For instance, they may lose their home and have to move into a long-term care facility. Not only does this lead to displacement but also a feeling of losing independence, sense of agency and freedom of mobility and choice (Morgan & Kunkel, 2007). Having a companion animal present may provide a sense of stability and a source of companionship in a time of stress (Siegel, 1990). There is ample support for companion animals' ability to enhance an older person's physical, mental and social health. Older adults who care for a companion animal show higher activities of daily living scores (Raina et al., 1999). This is due to the older adult being more physically active as a result of caring for a companion animal. Older adults who care for a companion animal are 36% less likely to report feeling lonely than those who do not care for one (Stanley, Conwell, Bowen & Van Orden, 2014). Older adults report companionship as being the primary benefit derived from their companion animals (Chur-Hansen, Winefield, & Beckwith, 2009; Suthers-McCabe, 2001). Animals that

provide companionship also provide social support. Older adults with minimal human social support but who had a companion animal from which they reported receiving social support were less depressed (Garrity, Stallones, Marx & Johnson, 1989). Attachment to companion animals leads to stable social support as well as reduction of depression (Krause-Parello, 2012). Attachment is a significant determinant of health for older adult companion animal owners (Chur-Hansen et al., 2009). In sum, life course events affect attachment to companion animals by either reducing or reinforcing that bond.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory as developed by Bowlby (1969) has been used to explain the beneficial effects of the relationship to a companion animals' owner (Sable, 1995; 2013). This was not the original intent of the theory. It was developed to explain an infant's attachment to its parent or parent-figure as a means of survival in times of stress or in reaction to a threat or a separation perceived as a threat (Bretherton, 1985). The impetus for the development of attachment theory came from a lack of object-relations theory in explaining a young child's anxious reaction to separation from their parent or parent-figure or a threat to that relationship. The origins of attachment theory are grounded in ethology and control systems theory but rely on the psychological foundations of attachment to explain the human/emotional aspect of a child's reactions in times of stress, threat or separation from a parent or parent-figure (Bretherton, 1985). One concern with the use of attachment theory to explain the human-animal bond is that it was not meant to be an inclusive theory to explain an emotional or social bond between just any two beings, but that of a reliant offspring, often a child, and their parent or parent-figure.

Bowlby postulated that a child's goal in seeking out their parent or parent-figure is to correct any feelings of anxiety brought about by their absence or by any threat to the relationship (Bretherton, 1985). Another concern with this theory being used to explain human-animal bond attachments is that "attachment figure" as it is used by Bowlby conveys a maternal role as the original name of attachment theory was 'maternal deprivation theory' (Rutter, 1972; 1979). Early replication studies determining attachment types of Bowlby's and his later partner, Mary Ainsworth's, utilized middle-aged female participants who had been separated from their mothers at an early age (Bifulco, Harris, & Brown, 1992). While current studies looking at the HAB have utilized men and women as study participants (Garrity et al., 1989; Zasloff, 1996), the entire premise of the theory is the purpose of determining the effects of maternal deprivation on biological offspring. In this context, and the time in which it was developed, perhaps it was implied that an emotional bond automatically existed between a mother and her infant, whereas one cannot assume this exists between a human and their companion animal.

Some argue that it is inappropriate to apply a theory developed to explain human attachment behavior to that of human-animal attachment behavior (Smolkovic et al., 2012). There is support that animals and humans can become attachment figures for each other. Cohen in the 70's (1974) claimed that "the object of attachment serves a special psychological function for which others cannot substitute" (Cohen, 1974. pg. 207). The difficulty with the process of the development of that attachment for the animal and psychological needs met by the animal are unknown and rely on anthropomorphic assumptions (Rynearson, 1978). While there are shared elements of attachment between

Bowlby's theory and how it is more commonly used to describe the HAB, such as the parent or parent-figure/pet owner being a secure base for the offspring/animal, there is a tendency of researchers to deviate too far from the traditional meaning and implications of the theory when applying it to the human-animal bond (Crawford, Worsham, & Swinehart, 2006).

Attachment, as it existed between a parent or parent-figure and their offspring, and as Bowlby intended, implies that an emotional bond existed between the two. The child's emotional reactions to psychological distress and ability to be comforted by the parent or parent-figure are in fact, the emotional reactions that were observed by Bowlby and therefore served as the basis for determining a child's attachment type to its parent or parent-figure (Bretherton, 1985). Considering this, attachment and emotional bond are used interchangeably throughout HAB literature. I argue that the two constructs while, similar in nature and used as such, are in fact, two different constructs that begin to overlap with each other as attachment develops into a stronger, more visceral emotional bond. Teasing apart where attachment and the emotional bond begin, which comes first, when they begin to overlap and how these two constructs are manifest in human-animal relationships is arguably a never-ending debate. The attachment one feels toward another may be the precursor of the emotional bond but the attachment never ceases to exist as the emotional bond becomes stronger with continued maintenance of attachment and reciprocity that exists between two beings.

Defining Attachment

It is important to differentiate between attachment and the emotional bond. Human-animal bond literature uses these terms interchangeably, but there are certain

nuances of each that should prohibit them from being considered the same construct. Definitions of attachment may assist in clarifying its meaning. Bowlby (as cited in Crawford, Worsham, & Swinehart, 2006) defines attachment as, "a form of behavior resulting in an individual seeking or maintaining proximity to another, clearly specified individual, who functions as a secure base and who is perceived as better able to cope with life stressors." Perhaps, as Bowlby uses this definition in the context of a parent or parent-figure and their offspring, the idea of attachment as being an emotional bond is implied. Keil (1998) defined attachment in the context of humans and non-human animals as "a hierarchical relationship between a human and an animal, which could be any living thing other than a plant or another human." It is also defined as human-animal attachment as based on emotions shared between the human and the animal (Budge, Spicer, Jones, & George, 1998). Both Keil's and Bowlby's definition speak to a behavior that is based on a sense of security and a form of hierarchy that serves the very specific function of psychological contentedness, likely obtained as a result of an existing emotional bond. The Budge et al. (1998) definition inserts an overt emotional component to attachment but still does not differentiate between attachment and an emotional bond as Keil uses the two terms interchangeably. Also implied in Budge et al.'s definition of attachment is a reciprocity of emotions shared between the human and non-human animal companion when it is extremely difficult to correctly ascertain if the emotions a human experiences toward the animal are reciprocated by the animal. This reciprocity is the key to what the difference is between feeling an attachment toward a companion animal and developing an emotional bond toward them.

Defining the Emotional Bond

Again, literature in the context of the human-animal bond uses the terms attachment and emotional bond interchangeably. Klaus and Kennel claimed that bonding is an initial phenomenon that occurs in a very defined early period after birth that is realized through physical contact between a mother and her newborn child. They claim bonding and attachment are not at all related and that bonding has no lasting effects on the emotional security of a child, while attachment is the primary determinant of such outcomes (Klaus & Kennel, 1976). I argue they are different constructs, though they closely overlap, and as the bond develops, the attachment remains and as long as attachment is maintained, so does the bond. What determines how a person develops an emotional bond toward their dog and how they develop an emotional bond with their lizard is based on three aspects of the relationship: Recognizing cross-species commonalities, anthropomorphizing and believing in the reciprocal nature of the relationship. Recognizing cross-species commonalities is one aspect that affects the bonds the men develop with their dogs that is often confused with anthropomorphizing. Recognizing cross-species commonalities is acknowledging that humans and non-human animals share similar experiences, such as fear and pain. Non-human animals may not experience these in the same manner in which a human might, but it is reasonable to assume that they do experience them. Being able to recognize that non-human animals experience similar emotions that humans experience creates in humans an empathy for the animal that drives the connection humans feel toward them.

The second aspect is anthropomorphizing, or attributing human-like characteristics to a non-human animal (Serpell, 2002). Anthropomorphizing is one option

for understanding an animal's behavior, the other being the ability to recognize cross-species commonalities. Anthropomorphizing goes above recognizing that non-human animals feel fear or pain, it is attributing a higher-level thought process ability to them. An example of this would be the following: A human hears a car backfire and notices their dog reacts by turning its head sharply toward the source of the noise and stares in the direction of the noise for a short amount of time before proceeding to hide under the bed. As opposed to feeling their dog is simply scared, the person believes the dog was deciding to attribute the noise to either a car backfiring or a firework going off and then deciding to hide as a result of its summation. This person has attributed a higher-order thinking ability to the non-human animal in thinking the dog is figuring out what was the cause of the noise. The men in this study demonstrate both behaviors of recognizing cross-species commonalities and anthropomorphizing. Is it unreasonable for them to assume that their dogs love them? Perhaps the purpose of anthropomorphic behavior is the same purpose as recognizing cross-species commonalities, that of instilling an empathy for the dogs that allows humans to connect to them. A person's propensity toward anthropomorphism is one part of what enables them to perceive an animal's behavior as reciprocal, which is the third aspect that affects the bond. This third aspect is an effect of the first two. For instance, a dog owner believes their dog is capable of demonstrating its affection to them, while their pet lizard is not. The owner believes their dog has more ability than the lizard to express what they perceive as whatever the dog is doing just for the sake of expressing its affection. The owner may ask, 'why would a dog rest its head on my chest and not a stranger's? A dog's tendency to engage in this very specific behavior may be perceived by its owner as reciprocal affection, especially when

the dog is fed, housed and otherwise properly cared for. Another example of this would be a dog risking its life for its owner. A person very well could be and likely is attached to their lizard, but they may not perceive that the lizard cares about them in return due to its lack of reciprocal affection.

It is the ability to recognize that non-human animals experience what humans experience such as feeling fear and pain, and perhaps have higher-order thought processes that lead to the belief that non-human animals can reciprocate a person's affection toward them that affects the emotional bonding process. I argue that these three ideas lead a person to develop an emotional bond to their companion animal that goes beyond simply feeling attached to them. While attachment remains consistent throughout the human-animal relationship, albeit in the absence of abuse, the emotional bond is experienced and has more emotionally affective consequences to the human than would only attachment.

My differentiating between the two constructs will become clearer in subsequent chapters as I demonstrate how the men manifest their attachments to their dogs and how those attachments develop into an emotional bond. The next section reviews how the emotional bond to a companion animal is used and manifest in current literature.

The Emotional Bond and Companion Animals

Studies of the emotional bond in HAB research goes back to the 1970's. One area of focus at that time was grief and loss. A reported effect of companion animal keeping at that time, and even now, was experiencing the emotional reactions of grief and loss to losing a companion animal to death (Keddie, 1977). The level of attachment one develops toward their companion animal is a strong determinant to how they intensely

they grieve after losing them (Archer, 1997). Archer compared the level of grief one feels after losing a companion animal to the level of grief one feels after losing a human loved one. People's life spans are longer relative to most companion animals they keep and therefore it is likely that one human may lose multiple companion animals over their life span meaning that this loss is not rare. Since over 53 million households have one or more companion animals, this loss affects millions of individuals (Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

Forty-six percent of companion animal caretakers report verbally telling their companion animal they love them at least once a day (Carlisle-Frank & Frank, 2006). Despite the lack of verbal language shared between the animal and owner, owners report feeling loved in return by their companion animal (Hens, 2009). It is not uncommon to hear companion animal owners report feeling closer to their companion animal than to a family member (Hall et al., 2004). Companion animal owners of all ages revel in the non-judgmental attitudes of their companion animals (Carlisle, 2014). A study of women who had no children living in their home found that the women found joy in offering love and affection to their companion animals and found purpose in doing so. They also found the women felt safer with a dog around, felt less depressed, and more loved, needed, and important simply because they cared for an animal (De-Guzman et al., 2009). In one study, many couples who did not have children said their companion animal was a source of love, purpose and fulfillment for them (Shir-Vertesh, 2012).

Older adult men's attachment to their dogs is an important area of focus that is just beginning to gain recognition among researchers (Blazina & Kogan, (Eds.) 2016). Themes that affect men's emotional bond with their dogs include attachment, gender role

theories, context, grieving and old age (Blazina & Kogan, (Eds.) 2016; Packman, Bussolari, Katz, & Carmack, 2016). The physical and psychological benefits of an animal companion to older adults have been reported. One study found that among older adults, living with a companion animal was related to experiencing less depression (Garrity et al., 1989). Older adults experience many physical changes that affect their appearance including wrinkles, gray hair, a stooped posture, and vision impairment (Morgan & Kunkel, 2007). While women are more sensitive to these physical changes than are men due to socially constructed ideals of female beauty (Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990), men are not immune. Companion animals have been found in this regard to be a source of nonjudgmental companionship and source of comfort (Soares, 1985). Dogs especially have beneficial social, physical and mental effects on their older owners (Siegel, 1990).

An attachment and a more visceral emotional bond exists between humans and their companion animals. Support for this phenomenon is well documented (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Kurdek, 2009; Woodward & Bauer, 2007). Research has also demonstrated that attachment to a companion animal contributes to an older adult's quality of life and well-being in many ways because of the bond (Chur-Hansen et al., 2009; Garrity et al., 1989; Stallones et al., 1990). What is missing from the literature is a clear explanation of what attachment to a companion animal means for older adult men; Particularly, how attachment changes and progresses over the life span as an effect of life course and develops into an emotional bond (if it ever does), and a conceptual model of the human-animal bond that better clarifies and represents the realities of the bond between a human and their non-human companion animal.

This dissertation seeks to remedy what is missing by investigating the meaning older adult men ascribe to attachments they form with their companion animal dogs and by examining the relationships between life stage, life course and the progression and outcomes of attachment to companion animal dogs with the purpose of moving toward the development of a theory that provides a deeper understanding of the emotional bond between older adult men and their companion animal dogs than is currently available. What led me to address these specific aims was a pilot study I conducted in the summer of 2016, the details of which are the topic of the next section

Pilot Study

In the summer of 2016 I began work on a study looking at the intersection of aging, companion animal ownership and health. I was well aware of the plethora of data extolling the physical, mental and social benefits of companion animal-keeping for their owners, but I wondered if the many health concerns that can afflict older adults prevented them from experiencing those benefits, either by preventing them from having a companion animal or by limiting their interactions with them. I set out to recruit, question and draw conclusions gathered from data from a population of older adult companion animal owners.

I interviewed 21 older adult pet owners, male (5) and female (16), aged 63 to 80. All participants had dogs and/or cats. I looked at if or how the health of the older adult was influencing their ability to care for their pets. Findings revealed: participants relied on their friends and family for assistance with pet care when needed and that care included taking pets to the vet and watching the animal when needed; female pet owners were also taking care of their older husbands; community pet services were helpful with

care. What I had found most interesting from this study was the data I had gathered from the five male dog owners I interviewed. For instance, I discovered the men had formed deep emotional bonds with their dogs, more so than some of the women had developed with their companion animals, which was the antithesis of what I was expecting to find. They used affectionate language to talk about their dog such as "we snuggle" and "he's my baby"; they were physically affectionate with their dogs; and they were openly and emotionally expressive when discussing them. The men also had data-rich stories. My summation of the male participants was that they were insightful men who were eager for someone to whom to relay their stories. It was through these five interviews that I was inspired to focus only on men and their dogs for the dissertation project in order to more fully elucidate the attachment and emotional bonds men form with their dogs.

Dissertation Study

A combination of the lack of focus on men in the literature concerning attachment to their companion animals; how context affects that attachment; and the outcomes of attachment and inspiration from the unique and insightful stories from the men who participated in my pilot study lead me to want to focus only on men and their dogs for the dissertation. Understanding the processes that lead to the development of an emotional bond from a life course perspective is significant because context is often overlooked when considering how and why men become attached or bonded to a companion animal. I also wanted to understand how life transitions such as retirement affect attachment and the bond as the five men who participated in the pilot study were retired and seemed to have developed a unique dynamic with their dogs as a result of that transition. Also of interest to me were ideas of aging, masculinity and identity in later life. The goal of this

study was movement toward the development of a theory that explains attachment to one's companion animal that is a different focus than that of Bowlby's original theory.

Significance- Potential Impact for Older Adult Men and the Human-Animal Bond

This research has potential to impact the field of the HAB by providing movement toward an empirically developed conceptual model with which to understand the meaning of older adult men's attachment and emotional bonds with their dogs. The significant meaning of this human-animal relationship to older adult men is related to their quality of life in older age, development or continuance of self-identity and self-reflections on being older men.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methods

Research Design

To address the specific aims of this project, I employed a phenomenological lens using a modified grounded theory approach to explore older adult men's attachment to dogs from a life course perspective. Understanding attachment and emotional bonding on any level other than superficial requires an in-depth interpretive analytical approach that can best be achieved using qualitative methods. My goal was to understand how older adult men maintain attachment to their dogs and how this attachment evolves into an emotional bond; to understand how the bond is affected by their individual life courses; to understand the meaning older adult men attribute to the bond they experience with their companion animals; and in the tradition of grounded theory, to move toward development of a theory of the HAB independent of Bowlby's attachment theory. In describing my research design, I briefly look at an underlying phenomenological lens. I then discuss the life course perspective and end with an overview of the limited grounded theory methods I employed.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience, or how people describe and interpret their experiences. The qualitative research approach of phenomenology (American phenomenology) is deeply embedded in its philosophical roots (European phenomenology). It was a philosophy first; a research method second (Donalek, 2004; Husserl, 1970 as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the purposes of this dissertation phenomenology was utilized as a guiding framework lens through which to develop a

theory for a field in which theory is lacking and to explain older adult men's experience of attachment and bonding to their dogs.

Qualitative research begins with a desire to understand experience of a phenomena where there is not much known. Much of qualitative research today relies heavily on philosophical beliefs concerning how we know what we know, and how we perceive reality (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A researcher utilizing a phenomenological lens while conducting qualitative research would be concerned with the nature of human experience, the uniqueness of human inquiry and thought, human interactions with environment and how that experience is perceived, observed and interpreted (Munhall, 1989).

American phenomenology, what is commonly used as a qualitative research method, developed from the European philosophy of phenomenology. One difference between the two is that European phenomenology's paradigm seeks to explore the primordial experience, or the pre-reflective phenomena. It seeks to illuminate the experience of phenomena before thought, without cultural influence, and without interpretation by the person who experienced the phenomenon. Its desire and purpose is to understand the essence of the phenomenon being investigated. American phenomenology, on the other hand, seeks to understand the reality of the person's experience of being engaged with a particular phenomenon. Another difference is that American phenomenology is more objective, more reflective, more engaging and influenced by culture (Caelli, 2000; Dowling, 2007). Applying the American phenomenological lens to this dissertation I focused on how older adult men develop emotional bonds with their dogs. I utilized a phenomenological lens because I was

concerned with the nature of men's experience of developing emotional bonds with their dogs and how men perceive the experience of developing emotional bonds with their dogs and how they interpret that experience.

Life Course

Interpretive research seeks to explain a phenomenon as experienced and constructed from the individual's subjective reality. A life course perspective will further enhance understanding of a phenomenon such as attachment to companion animals. A life course perspective provides a multidisciplinary paradigm that seeks to explain experience within historical contexts of time, place and meaning as well as demographic and developmental factors that affect all individuals throughout their life span (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2007). Perspectives on aging in sociological research include life course and social constructionist approaches (Dannefer & Uhlenberg, 1999; Gubrium & Holstein, 1999). A social constructionist view defines lived experience as an interaction of two or more living beings whose construction of experience is developed as a result of that interaction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Life course strategies within a sociological framework are used as both a "theoretical orientation" and a "methodological approach" that can be used within other theoretical frameworks in order to provide a more comprehensive examination and explanation of how culture, society and personal choices combine to affect lived experience (Elder et al. 2003; Settersten, 2006).

In terms of studying an older adult's lived experience of their relationship to their companion animals over the life span, a phenomenological perspective could assist in making distinctions between certain stages of life stage related to age. For example, it may address the question "How is your relationship with your companion animal

different now at age 70 than it was at age 50?" From a life course perspective, the question becomes how one's life stage affects their relationship with their companion animals, even if the companion animal itself has changed. Settersten (2006) claimed that making the distinction between lived experience of older age and lived experience of younger age should be a goal of gerontologists. He goes on to say,

> "Understanding the life course is about describing individual and collective experiences and statuses over long stretches of time and explaining the short-and long-range causes and consequences of these patterns. It is also about addressing a range of social, historical, and cultural forces that determine the structure and content of life experiences and pathways." (pg. 4).

Old age is "an accumulation of life experiences" (Fuller-Iglesias, Smith & Antonucci, 2009). Utilizing a phenomenological lens allows a researcher to determine what is common among older adults' life experiences of companion animal ownership and define what is different as a result of age and context. Understanding the common nature of lived experiences, as well as the deviations from this common nature could clearly explain how a person's choices, culture, community and personality influence their experiences as well as the way in which they interpret their experiences.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory was developed in the 60's by sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Its focus is on extensive comparative analysis, theory generated from data, and interpretations including the voices of participants studied (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Grounded theory uses data as a means with which to *formulate* a hypothesis and develop theory. Aspects of this method were utilized here due to the exploratory nature of the project and the lack of a current tailored theory that explains the HAB for older adults. Analysis of the data generated

concepts and ideas, which then explained the nature of the data. For instance, with regard to the meaning of attachment, participants reported different dimensions of meaning. Further analysis revealed the nature of these dimensions and their relationship within an overall perspective. Study participants' past and current experiences with dogs provided the primary source of data.

Initial data was gleaned from individual interviews with each participant. During this phase of research, the approach of grounded theory was employed using a constant comparative method. Interviews were "intensive;" they were generally neither confined by time nor constrained by the formal structuring of questions. The purpose of the interviews was to seek to understand the subjective experience of a phenomena from the participants' perspectives. Panel discussions employed a modified version of grounded theory as these discussions were used as both a confirmatory method as well as a means with which to develop theory with the intent of understanding older adult men's emotional bonds with their dogs.

Methodology

In the previous section I reviewed how this dissertation was designed using a life course perspective with elements of phenomenology and grounded theory. In this section I describe how the dissertation was conducted using methods associated with each of the perspectives discussed in the previous section.

The study involved individual in-depth interviews with 12 older adult male dog owners followed by repeated, panel group discussions with a subgroup of those interviewed in order to move toward development of a theory of the HAB for older adult

males. This involved comparison of multiple perspectives and processes of extensive feedback involving myself as a researcher and the participants in the study.

A large amount of data was generated. Due to the underlying philosophy of the study design, involving intensive data collection over time, the number of participants was limited. It was more important to recruit appropriate participants and to maintain the relationship with this small group over the eight-month period of the study. I used convenience sampling and recruited 12 participants who represent a limited range of ages (persons over 60), a variety of companion animal dog experiences and diverse social contexts including family configurations and demographics.

Sample

The sample included 12 participants who were all older adult male dog owners. Convenience sampling was utilized as this sampling method allowed for a community of dog-owners to alert others in the local area of the possibility of participating. The theoretical parameters of this project were that the participants had varied backgrounds and experiences with dogs. Participants included men only, a range of ages (60 and older), having dogs for companion animals, and family contexts including married, cohabiting, and divorced.

Procedure

Recruitment took place through the use of flyers posted at local veterinary clinics, local cafes and the senior center, word of mouth, and through the use of a phone application that advertised by targeting locals from Lexington, KY. Two of the participants for the dissertation were participants in my pilot study. Those interested contacted me via phone or email. Participants were informed of the intended design of

the study (i.e. sharing of personal beliefs and experiences and the length of time commitment) and if interested, met with me in person. I explained to each participant that they only needed to meet with me once for the individual interview, but if I desired to have them participate in the panels, and if they agreed, they would need to commit to three panels over three months. Once participants agreed to participate in the initial individual interview and met participation criteria (male, aged 60+, currently caring for a dog as a companion animal, ability and means with which to drive to meet me individually as well as to the panel discussions, and speak fluent English) they signed a consent form as approved by the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board (17-0400-X1B).

Data Collection

One-on-one in-depth interviews followed by panel discussions was the means of data gathering for this study. The interviews and panel discussions resulted in two complementary sources of data. Both individual interview responses and data derived from the panel discussions were important in this project. Individual interviews allowed for greater time to provide personal, detailed responses related to individual experience. The purpose of the panel discussions was confirmatory and exploratory, and allowed me as the moderator, the opportunity to confirm with the men as a group that the major themes I identified from the individual interviews were valid. The panel discussions were also designed to encourage conversation about the major themes which led to feedback and discussion among members of the group that generated further insight into their experience as older adult male dog owners. The panels took place over three months, once per month in November and December of 2017 and January of 2018. The

panel discussions revealed more in-depth data on the emergent major themes as participants developed trust with each other as well as with myself.

I chose to run my panel discussions with an intended six participants. This number allowed for the greatest level of interaction and individual participation. I chose men for the panels after I had completed their individual interviews. I was able to know during the individual interviews whether or not I would ask each man at the conclusion of the interview if he wanted to participate in the panels. I chose men who I felt were insightful and articulate in order to facilitate in depth discussions of the chosen topics (Bucy, 2006). For this project, in-depth individual interviews and three panel discussions over three months provided more useful data than the use of a large number of participants with fewer data collection points and less in-depth data collection. The nature of the panel discussions provided the participants and myself an opportunity to develop trust with each other. The panel discussions as a means of data collection was important for confirmation of the men's experience of attachment to their companion animal dog(s) as well as for developing deeper insight on the emerging theoretical perspective.

Measures

Individual Interviews

Intensive in-depth interviews with each participant were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A). The semi-structured interview guide focused on the three specific aims of the study. Interview questions asked were open-ended with the goal of understanding each man's subjective experience of being an older adult male dog owner. There was a focus on the meaning and experience of being an older adult male dog owner and understanding how life stage and life course affected attachment and

opportunities to bond with their companion animal dogs. Interview questions were directed but flexible; open-ended but purposive; and shaped but adaptable (Charmaz, 2014). To reduce fatigue each individual interview session was designed to last no longer than 90 minutes. In only one instance (out of 12) did an interview last less than 90 minutes. The remaining 11 interviews lasted closer to 120 minutes each. All individual interviews took place at a time and place of the participants' choosing. Locations included local cafes and the participant's homes. The in-depth interviews allowed for understanding each of the men's individual stories and experiences before the participants began to meet as a panel. During the individual interviews, demographic information was collected (Appendix B). Analysis of the data gathered from the individual interviews was iterative and influenced the topics that were discussed in subsequent panel discussions. For example, because in the individual interviews anthropomorphizing was a frequently discussed dimension of attachment, "How does anthropomorphizing play a role in attachment to companion animals" became a topic for panel discussions. At the conclusion of each individual interview, each participant was given my email address and was informed that they could email me at any time to add additional thoughts they felt would assist in the study. This did not occur.

Panel Discussions

The qualitative panels were instrumental in exploring change and the development of the men's ideas and thinking. The men and I worked together as a team to provide the information necessary to address all three specific aims. These panel discussions commenced upon completion of all individual interviews. They were used to promote critical thinking and "engaged involvement" of men who share a common

background, expertise or experience, in this case, being older adult male dog owners. They were also used as a confirmatory mechanism to ensure that the themes which came from the individual interviews were valid and accurately represented the men's experiences. The men chosen to participate in the panel discussions were chosen due to their ability to eloquently convey their experiences to me during their individual interviews, their willingness and availability to participate in three panel discussions over three months, and their motivation to engage. Two days before the initial panel discussion was to commence one participant emailed me telling me he could not participate due to having to travel for work. I then approached another man whom I had interviewed and asked him if he'd like to participate. He agreed to participate in all three panel discussions. As a result, I was expecting to have seven men in the last two panel discussions, but one was not able to attend these due to traveling for work, which left an expected six men to participate in each panel discussion. One participant missed the second panel discussion due to having the flu and another missed the third and final discussion due to falling asleep in his chair at home. A follow-up individual interview was conducted with the one participant who had fallen asleep to give him the opportunity to provide feedback on the topics of the third panel discussion. While this was not ideal, each man showed interest in providing feedback on the panels they missed and requested to meet in order to share. They were therefore offered the opportunity to do so.

Panel discussions took place in a private meeting room at a public library in Lexington, KY. Panel discussion topics reflected an expansion on topics that emerged from the individual interviews. The men were unaware of the topics to be covered in the first panel discussion. At the conclusion of the first panel discussion, the men were

verbally told what the topics of the second panel discussion would be. At the conclusion of the second panel discussion, the men were verbally told what the topics of the third panel discussion would be. As a result, they had time to think about the topics to be discussed prior to attending each panel discussion; the idea was to facilitate the generation of thoughtful and perceptive data from the discussions. Because one of the primary goals of this study was to develop meaningful theory related to attachment to companion animals, I wanted the data gathered to be rich, detailed, and discussed among the companion animal owners. I have detailed each panel discussion including date, time and location of discussion, topics discussed, and who was in attendance in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Panel Discussion Details

Panels	**Panel Discussion #1**	**Panel Discussion #2**	**Panel Discussion #3**
Location	Lexington Public Library, Harrodsburg Branch	Lexington Public Library, Harrodsburg Branch	Lexington Public Library, Harrodsburg Branch
Date Held	Monday, November 6th, 2:00 PM.	Monday, December 11th, 2:00 PM	Monday, January 8th, 2:00 PM
Men in Attendance	Chip Vernon Norman David James Jack	Chip Vernon Norman David Jack (James out due to having the flu).	Chip Vernon Norman David James (Jack out due to falling asleep).
Topics of Discussion	Pack Mentality Life Stages Retirement Responsibility of Care	Attachment Emotional Bond Anthropomorphism	Loss

Coding

All individual interviews and panel discussions were audio-recorded. I transcribed each of the recordings. Transcription took place at the conclusion of each interview and panel discussion. Coding began with a line by line analysis of the transcripts resulting in the development of an open coding scheme that revealed meaningful pieces of data that spoke to similarities among the men's experiences of attachment to their dogs (Glaser & Strauss, 2012; Saldana, 2009). What Glaser and Strauss refer to as open coding, Charmaz refers to as initial coding (2006). These two coding methods are similar, related to grounded theory methods and desire to result in theoretical data utilized in the development of theory. The process of looking for relationships among the groupings that resulted from open coding is axial coding, which was the next step in the process of analysis. Axial coding helped to further delineate the groupings. Finally, selective coding involved identifying overarching core themes that encompassed all of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 2012). Charmaz refers to axial and selective coding as focused coding. The themes were informed by the participants' data and by the overall gestalt of the combined participant experiences to form global themes related to aging, identity, attachment to companion animals and the process of developing emotional bonds with their dogs (Saldana, 2009).

Chapter Four: Twelve Men and Their Dogs

"People love dogs. You can never go wrong adding a dog to the story." Jim Butcher

In the summer of 2016 I was able to recruit 21 older adult participants for my pilot study of the intersection of aging, health and companion animal-keeping. Five of these participants were men. The men's stories of their experiences with companion animals influenced me to look at men who care for dogs for this dissertation. I chose to interview two of the men who had participated in the pilot study. I also asked several women I had interviewed in the pilot study if I could interview their husbands and I was able to recruit three men via this method. Three more men were recruited through the use of a cell phone application (neighborhood app) that can be used as an advertisement site for local neighborhoods. Finally, four men were recruited via word of mouth. The result was a group of 12 men who became the participants in this dissertation.

This chapter will tell the story of these men and their dogs. The men are introduced in the order in which they were interviewed. I begin with Norman.

Norman

I had met Norman's wife, Anne, when I interviewed her for my pilot study. I then met Norman while participating in a course on aging in place at the University of Kentucky. I had kept in touch with Anne so I asked her if she thought Norman would be interested in participating in a study on men and their dogs. She felt he would be interested and helped me to arrange an interview. And so Norman became my first interviewee for the dissertation. We met at a local café that I knew he and Anne frequent. Anne was present but did not participate in the discussion. Norman sat across from me

and Anne to my left. I did not know about Norman personally and was pleased to learn over the course of our interaction that he was a charismatic and eloquent man. I could tell immediately upon meeting Norman that he enjoyed speaking with me about his two dogs and that the interview would be fruitful.

Norman is 72 years old and prefers to go by Norm. He has a high school education and he and Anne owned their own local business until he retired and it was sold. They are parents to two grown sons. Both Norm and Anne are from Eastern Kentucky. Norm has a slight accent bespoken of eastern Kentucky and speaks without hesitation. He and Anne have lived in Kentucky all their lives. They own a home together on 11 acres of land outside of Lexington. A tall man with white hair and striking blue eyes, he speaks just loudly enough to be heard. He and Anne care for two dogs named Bear and Lexi. Bear is a three-year old, male Saint Bernard and Lexi is a seven-year old female Saint Bernard/Great Pyrenees mix. They adopted Lexi first when she was a year and a half old from a shelter and Bear about a year later from a breeder as a puppy.

Norm was very animated throughout the interview. He made good eye contact, smiled, and seemed pleased to be speaking to someone so interested in his relationship with his dogs. He spoke with purpose and intention and did not carry on endlessly to where the discussion became repetitive but was engaging and thoughtful. He told me that he was strongly influenced by Anne to find Bear as Lexi was not 100% Saint Bernard and she wanted a purebred Saint Bernard. That is how they have two very large dogs. He treats the dogs equally but does feel a closer emotional connection to Lexi as she is “His dog.”

Vernon

I interviewed Vernon the first time during my pilot study in the summer of 2016. His wife, Mary contacted me via email on his behalf to suggest that he might be interested in participating in my dissertation study. Vernon is 72 years old. He and Mary live 30 minutes outside of Lexington so I drove to their home to conduct the interview. They own a large two-story house painted in deep greens and burgundies. There is a large tree in front of the residence and a side shed to the left. The front yard is not fenced, but there is a fence along the left side of the house and around the back. They live on a busy road. In the back of their property they maintain a dog training site and a boarding kennel. Mary also works in town as a veterinary technician.

Vernon greets me at the door holding Zeus, his very small Yorkie. Their home has dark wooden floors and a stairway leading up to the second story directly on the left as you walk in. There are two large brocade couches in floral patterns, a matching chair, and a small old flat-screen television attached to the wall above a fireplace that is inlaid with hand-painted green tiles. A large side table sits next to the chair and a coffee table sits in front of one of the couches. The coffee table is covered in travel guides and photo albums containing pictures of the many trips they have taken together. The residence feels crowded but homey, organized and lived in. To the left are two entryways. One leads to a small office space and then into the kitchen. The other leads to a large bright room where dog crates are kept. The interior colors are dark browns, greens and burgundies. A small companion animal bed is located directly to the left of the coffee table. This indoor bed also acts as a car seat for Zeus when Vernon takes him out for rides.

Vernon was in the Army for three years in his early 20's and was involved in the Vietnam War. After that, he went to work for the government conducting water and waste chemical tests for the city of Lexington and reluctantly retired when they started changing his retirement benefits. He considers himself an "outdoor" man who in his younger years enjoyed hiking, camping, spelunking and mountain climbing. He and Mary were married later in life as Vernon was previously divorced. Vernon is retired, but Mary is still working as a veterinary technician as well as keeping the kennels and training school. He enjoys engaging in Civil War reenactments and told me about the attire he wears for such events. He has been a guest speaker in history classes at the University of Kentucky that focus on the Civil War.

Vernon and Mary care for three dogs of their own as well as the numerous dogs that come and go through their training and boarding facility. Zeus is a 10-year old male Yorkie, Cozette is a female Australian Shepherd whose age is unknown and Amelia is a three-year old female mutt.

Vernon has a deep, very masculine voice. He is a short man and very thick; not overweight, just a thick man. He is balding slightly with gray hair. I sat in a chair on one side of the coffee table and he sat across from me on the couch. Zeus moved around during the interview sitting either next to Vernon on the couch, in his bed, or on Vernon's lap. Vernon was wearing jeans and a button-up long-sleeved shirt in green tones. He has a habit of opening his shirt and tucking Zeus inside where he will fall asleep with his head sticking out. Mary mentioned how he could "Go on and on for hours" as he "loves having someone over to talk to." I was there for about three hours.

James

I met James for the first time when he was a participant in my pilot study. He found me through an advertisement I had placed in a University of Kentucky newsletter. I e-mailed James and asked him if would be interested in participating in my dissertation study and he was quick to say he would. We met at a local coffee shop to conduct our interview. James looked the same as when we first met, despite having hip surgery. We sat over in a corner to talk and we both soon realized the atmosphere was loud. He asked one of the Barista's to turn down the music so we could hear and chat better. He got some coffee and I admitted to being on my second Chai tea latte of the day. He laughed at this. We small-talked for a bit to catch up and then went into the interview.

James appears to be younger than his 72 years as his hair is still dark. He is about 5'10". He strikes me as being jolly, laid-back and content. He has a very deep laugh that is begging to get out from a cavernous area within him and when it does it is loud and infectious. You can't help but smile when he laughs and even laugh with him. James earned his Ph.D. in analytical chemistry from Michigan State University in 1977. He worked at the University of Kentucky for 35 years in the chemistry department, officially retiring in January, 2012. He has over 50 academic publications including books. His reputation is chronicled on the chemistry department's website as being a "dedicated and committed professor." He and his wife, DeAnna, have three children and own a log home 45 minutes outside of Lexington in a rural area. James and DeAnna have three dogs; Lucy, a seven-year old female poodle mix; Stella, a five -year old female poodle mix; and Minnie, a 12-year old female poodle. They acquired Stella when she was a puppy; Lucy when she was four or five months old; and Minnie they got from their granddaughter just

this past year. They had Lucy first and found her at a shelter in Kentucky; Stella came next and then Minnie. James' story focuses more on Lucy as she is a "special dog," but he speaks fondly of all his dogs.

Warren

Warren was referred to me by his wife, Ruth. She was also a participant in my pilot study. I met Warren for the first time on the day I interviewed him in his home. He and Ruth live in an elegant neighborhood in a red brick home they own. Ruth met me at the door and led me into their home with a smile on her face. Directly through the front door to the right you see pictures of their travels displayed on a dark wood side table. Ceilings stretch to over 12 feet making the home feel capacious and stately. Huge floor to ceiling windows on the opposite side of the house lead to a well-manicured back yard. Later, Warren would tell me they bought the house because the yard was so perfect for their dog, Peaches. A spacious living area was appointed with mostly white and cream-colored furniture. The walls were white as well. The only thing that stood out in the home against the white walls and furnishings was a small, black Pomeranian lying peacefully on the couch snuggled up in a white blanket.

After being introduced to Warren who was sitting in his favorite recliner, Ruth and I spoke of their travels for over an hour. Warren sat to my left and was mostly silent for this discussion. Warren and I got down to business when Ruth and I felt we had exhausted our chat. We moved to and sat at the kitchen table, he to my right, while Ruth watched television in the living room. The kitchen was partially open to the living room so I assume she overheard our conversation. She came to check on him once. I found this to be endearing.

Warren's chronological age is 66 years old, but his personality portrayed a man who was young at heart and joyful. He worked in the coalmines for years in eastern Kentucky where he and Ruth lived before moving to Lexington. He did not work manual labor in the mines but worked as a manager. Warren has lived in Kentucky all his life and has two children from a previous marriage. The only companion animal he had cared for before Peaches was a cat (now deceased) that was given to him and Ruth. He prefers dogs as companion animals due to the opportunities for interaction. Peaches is 14 years old. They adopted her seven years ago from a shelter in eastern Kentucky. The shelter had taken her in from a man who owned and ran a puppy mill (a commercial breeding center). The man was no longer in need of Peaches due to her age.

Warren spoke in gentle tones throughout the interview. He is an unassuming man while his wife is more assertive and vigorous in her speech and mannerisms. Slightly balding with white hair, he has striking blue eyes and appears fit. He speaks with the slight southern accent that is typical of persons from eastern Kentucky. He is one of the many participants I spoke with who was strongly influenced by their spouse to obtain their current dog but is nonetheless quite emotionally attached to his companion animal.

John

John's wife contacted me through the cell-phone neighborhood application and scheduled a time for me to go to their home and interview John. They live near the end of a cul-de-sac in an old, historical area of Lexington, near a park where they can walk their dogs. John and one of the dogs greeted me at the door. The dog, Roxie, was quite the barker, but quieted down right away. Walking into the home I instantly felt a sense of coziness. Directly across from the front door was a large rock fireplace that takes up the

entire wall area. The floors are a red brick with enough differentiation to give character and dimension. The furnishings are dark with a brown leather couch and a large leather chair with deep red throw blankets thrown over the arms. A tree trunk had been shaped to provide a large coffee table in front of the couch. The ceiling was vaulted with dark brown wooden beam supports. The interior made me feel as though I was outside in the woods but inside a log cabin. Roxie and Charlotte disappeared as I did not see them for a while. I sat on the large couch and John sat to my left in the cushy chair.

John is 63 years old but appears much younger as his hair is dark brown, his skin bears few wrinkles and he is very trim and fit. John is easily over six feet tall. He has an undergraduate degree and worked for LexMark for 30 years before retiring in his 50's about nine years ago. Currently, he works as a leadership coach for churches locally and internationally, requiring him to frequently travel. He has lived in Kentucky all his life. John and his wife, Diane have two grown sons who do not live nearby. John has cared for 11 dogs over his life. They currently have two. One is Roxie, a Cardigan Welsh Corgi, female, aged six; and the other is Charlotte, a mix, female aged one. John mentions his dog, Ruby, throughout his interview. She passed away, but he is very closely connected to her. They also have a cat, which I did not see. John flew to Florida and adopted Roxie and drove back with her in a single day. She slept in the passenger car seat. He claims that this time together helped in developing their current bond.

John spoke in low, smooth tones and was very soft-spoken. Listening to him speak was like listening to bourbon crème being poured over ice. He was emotional at times throughout the interview, mostly when speaking of his dog, Ruby. We met on a very hot and sunny summer day, therefore I was not surprised to see him wearing dark

green shorts, tennis shoes and a simple red t-shirt for our discussion. It became apparent early in the interview that John is a spiritual man. This was evident in the way he spoke of people and his dogs. Two dogs he spoke frequently of were Ruby and Stanley. Stanley died in July of 2017, less than two months before we met. Ruby died the year before. John gave me something very special that he had written up after losing Ruby. One of the local animal shelters was asking for stories of how a companion animal has changed its owner's life and John decided to write a detailed story about how Ruby had changed him. Unfortunately, the shelter would not accept it for competition as Ruby had died and they required the companion animal be living, but he submitted it anyway. I have included this story here in the dissertation chapter seven. He had not shared this with anyone but gave me permission to use it for the dissertation.

Chip

Chip is a professor of Forestry at the University of Kentucky. I was able to recruit him through the same cell-phone neighborhood application I had used to recruit John and Carter. His wife contacted me through the application and gave me Chip's name and email. A common theme began to appear as it was often through these men's wives that I was contacted and subsequently given their husband's information. Chip's office at the university happens to be across the street from mine. I met with him early in the morning one week before fall semester commenced. It was an extremely hot and muggy day. I walked into the Forestry Department building and up the stairs to the second floor. The building is not air-conditioned. I found his office and knocked. Realizing he was not in, I stood outside reading the comics he had posted in his door. I soon heard a deep "Hello" and turned around to greet him. He is about 5'10". He has white hair and a white beard.

He was dressed in khakis and a polo shirt. We introduced ourselves and walked into his office, which was, much to my relief, air-conditioned by a window unit. His office is large with wooden floors and high ceilings making the office feel spacious despite being crammed with books, artifacts, logs, chairs, and odd sorts of machinery I could not identify. He cleared off a cluttered chair for me to sit and then sat across from me in his chair near his desk.

For over an hour he spoke in detail of the items in his office. He spoke of his career and his students. He clearly has a passion for supporting his students in their endeavors. He showed me pictures of his travels to Sweden and spoke of how a replica of a machine he owns was used to make the music in the original Star Trek series. After about an hour and a half he said, "Well, should we get started?"

Chip has lived in Kentucky for 16 of his 63 years. He previously lived in Mississippi and Georgia. He and his wife, Leanne, do not have children. He has cared for six dogs over his life and currently has Lucky, a Great Pyrenees, female, who is four and Teddy, a male Labrador/Chow mix who is eight. They adopted Lucky from a Great Pyrenees rescue group and Teddy from a shelter. He was influenced by his wife to get Teddy and Lucky. Lucky was adopted first followed by Teddy. He has four guinea pigs right now and seems to be quite fond of them. Two indoor cats and six outdoor cats as well as the local raccoons are well-fed by Chip. In total, they care for 14 animals plus the neighborhood raccoons. Chip prefers having two dogs at a time and perhaps, fewer than four guinea pigs at one time.

I was concerned about audio recording him for the interview as he is a very soft-spoken man. He must be aware of his quiet mannerisms as he turned off the air

conditioner and offered to hold the audio recorder. The first thing I noticed was that he became very business-like right away. I imagine this is due in part to being a professor and being familiar with research and the process of gathering data. He seemed very willing to share his time and stories with me. I felt very relaxed and comfortable around him.

Larry

Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, Larry has died. He was living with stage four-esophageal cancer that had spread to his liver. I became aware of his death during one of the panel sessions when Larry's brother in law, Jack, mentioned it to me. I met Larry through his sister, Bertie. I had interviewed Bertie for my pilot study. She asked me if I would be interested in interviewing her brother when he came to stay in Lexington. He lived more than three hours south of Lexington but came in to town for his cancer treatments. While here, he stayed with his sister for a few days at a time. It was during one of these times that I was able to interview Larry at Bertie's home. Larry's wife, Sheri, greeted me at the door and then Bertie came and invited me in. Bertie and her husband, Jack, live in a split-level home so as you walk in you can either go downstairs to the lower living area or upstairs where the main living area is along with the kitchen, dining and living rooms. There is access to the back deck and yard through the dining room. I interviewed Larry on the deck outside as it was a lovely day. He was sitting in a chair at a table in the shade when I arrived. He did not get up as I came out and greeted me rather quietly and did not seem all that interested in being interviewed for the study. Although he was kind and polite, he seemed distracted. He looked older than his 65

years, but I felt this was due to his cancer treatment. He was wearing a hat the entire time, but I could tell he had experienced hair loss. He did not appear to be thin or pale.

Larry had a master's degree and worked for the government doing defense contract work before he was forced to retire last year due to his cancer. He missed more days of work than was allowed and was asked to retire. He was also told he could go back to work, although to a different position, when and if he was better. Larry was born in Indiana but lived in Kentucky for 42 years. He and his wife owned a home in Hopkinsville, about three hours south west of Lexington. Charlie was the last dog he cared for and she died two years ago. She was a terrier mix. She was euthanized when she was 16 years old due to seriously declining health. He had two cats, which he spoke of very fondly. He seemed very positive about the outlook of his cancer and I remember wondering if this was based in reality or was a reflection of a man who had lost all hope.

Larry spoke with an even cadence and although he spoke in low tones, I did not find it difficult to understand him. He refused to discuss Charlie on many occasions, even when I asked him direct questions about her. Instead, he focused on his cats and dogs he had previously owned that he gave away. I felt the reasoning behind this and his frequently mentioning his cats were due to a few things: the fact that his cats are alive and his dog is not; and the reality of his stage four cancer may make it difficult to discuss loss and death in any context.

Jack

Jack is Bertie's husband and Larry's brother-in-law. I knew of Jack's existence but had never met him, even though I had been in his home two times before. Jack agreed to be interviewed for the dissertation so I went to their home for the third time to

interview him early in the morning. Their home had blooming pink and purple rhododendrons in the front with a few pink hydrangea bushes that were being watered by the garden hose. Bertie let me in and we walked upstairs. She offered me a cup of tea and we made small talk before she went to her back room to quilt. I noticed a miniature pink and cream quilt that was laid out on their dining room table. A relative had given birth to a baby girl and Bertie was making her a quilt. Jack and I sat in the living room for our interview. I sat on the couch and he sat in his chair to my right. I noticed what appeared to be a newer quilt hung on the main wall that separated the living room from the kitchen. Jack and I did not do much small talking but got to the point of the interview very quickly.

Jack's family is from eastern Kentucky and he lived in Lawrenceburg, which is in central Kentucky until he moved to Lexington. He spent three years in the military. After he had completed his military time, he worked in law enforcement until he retired. Bertie encouraged Jack to go back to work after four months of being home. Now, he works full-time at Keeneland (a local horse racing track) in their security department. He had never been to Keeneland before he went there to apply for a job, despite living in Kentucky all his life. Jack was previously married and has four daughters from that marriage. The first family companion animal he can remember was a dog and he has cared for dogs ever since. He and Bertie lost their dog, Winston, three months ago. Winston was a large Border collie and had health concerns and had to be euthanized at the age of 14. Five years ago Winston tore his anterior cruciate ligament and had mobility problems as a result. Jack referred to Winston as a member of the family. They had adopted him when he was just a puppy and he was the only dog they had for the last 14

years. Bertie is insistent on getting another dog, but if it were up to Jack, they would not. Curiously enough, at the time of writing, Jack and Bertie have adopted two new puppies named Cosmo and Oscar. Jack seems to be very pleased and happy with the new puppies.

Jack spoke with a soft southern accent typical of people from eastern Kentucky. He was affable, easy-going, and authentic. He was very open with me and did not seem to be shy or embarrassed when he became emotional when speaking of Winston. Jack is a tall, large man mostly bald and clean shaven. He looks much younger than his 68 years. He is very healthy with no complaints spoken of. He was very engaged throughout the interview and seemed genuinely pleased to be talking with me. I enjoyed our conversation and I sensed he did as well.

Carter

I recruited Carter through the cell-phone neighborhood application. His wife volunteered him for the study and gave me his email so that I could contact him directly. It took Carter and I a while to get together due to his work schedule, but when we did, it was a very entertaining conversation. We met at a local café in Lexington. He lives just around the corner from that café but came from work. After getting some coffee and tea, we found a quiet table in the back near a window. He knew three people who were there for lunch and said hello to each of them. He is well-known in town as he works in sports radio for the university sports teams.

Carter enjoys his current work so much that he has no plans to retire any time soon. He is married to Rosa and they have two grown children. Rosa works as a nurse. Carter has lived and worked in Kentucky all his life except for two years he spent in Dallas, TX. Dogs and birds have been Carter's companion animals of choice. He

currently cares for Freyja, a 10-month old, female Golden Retriever/Great Pyrenees mix and a three-year old, male Beagle named Atlas. Rosa recently had to put their other dog, Kiwi, down at the age of 16. They adopted Freyja as Atlas had some separation anxiety after Kiwi died and they felt they needed another dog to keep him company and hopefully reduce some of this anxiety. They adopted Freyja from the local Humane Society.

Carter is a very tall man, over six feet tall. He has a giddy personality and exudes the energy of a man half his age. His hair is still dark and he is slender and fit. He speaks in a direct way, but not in a way that is intimidating or overbearing. He was very eager to share with me and told me not just about his own companion animals, but his son's personal pet dog as well as his son's work dog. He regaled me with engaging stories about his dogs and I found him to be eloquent and articulate. He seems to be especially attached to his newest dog, Freyja. Carter treated me like I was his best friend, even though we had never met before this interview.

David

I met David through a friend of mine. My friend had informed him of my dissertation study and gave him my email. Less than a week went by before he e-mailed me saying he would like to participate in the study. He lives in Louisville and was willing to drive to Lexington (about an hour and 15 minutes east of Louisville) to conduct the interview. We met at a local café in Lexington. After getting himself some tea and a chocolate chip cookie, we chose a table near the back hoping it would be quiet.

David was born in Illinois and left for college after he graduated high school. He went to a small liberal arts college in Michigan, graduated, and moved to Ontario,

Canada to pursue his Ph.D. That particular program was not a good fit for him, so he left it, and instead, pursued a master's degree from Eastern Michigan University. Later, he then went back to Illinois for his Ph.D. After he completed his Ph.D., he moved to California and worked for the Veterans Administration conducting research. He worked for a fortune 500 company for a few years. This was not a rewarding career so he decided to work for an educational company designing science kits to be used in colleges and high schools. After this, he did a post-doc in Ohio and then worked in the toxicology department for the University of Louisville. The Louisville health department was his next position and he worked there as an epidemiologist for 17 years. This was the last job he had before he retired three years ago. He owns his own home in Louisville and lives there with his partner, Annette. He does not have children. He has cared for six dogs over his life. Currently, he cares for his only companion animal; his black Field Spaniel named Woofy. David did not name her and said he would have been more creative in naming her if he had acquired her as a puppy. She is 11 years old and was adopted from a breeder who had used her as a show dog.

David does not hem and haw over his words but speaks clearly and precisely with intention. He is fit and healthy as a result of frequenting the gym and walking with Woofy. Black-rimmed glasses frame his eyes and has white hair is striking against the dark glasses. He wore a simple black t-shirt and jeans for the interview. I was quite nervous in the beginning of our interview, although I do not know why, even now, because he was very gracious with his time with me. He showed me many pictures of Woofy he had on his phone. At one point during the interview, he began to cry; neither he nor I expected it. After that initial expression of emotion, he cried frequently. David is

a very well-spoken man but did not hesitate to pause and think about some questions before answering. This lent itself to us having some productive and genuine moments laden with meaning and emotion.

Ray

I met Ray through a mutual acquaintance. She gave him my e-mail and he responded saying he would like to participate in the study. He lives in south-central Kentucky about an hour and a half south of Lexington. I drove to his home early one summer morning. He lives in a one-story brick home off the main interstate in a rural area. I had to stop in the middle of the road at one point to allow geese to cross. I drove past his home once, turned around and drove back. His address was on a mailbox across the street, which I could not read due to the small numbers. I parked my car hesitantly in his driveway, still unsure if I was at the correct house. His home is painted pale yellow, which looks like a daisy situated among the verdant foliage so common this time of year. It sits across the road from a large pond and a beautiful view of rolling hills. His lawn was perfectly manicured, cars were sparkling clean and his property clearly well-cared for. I was met by his dog, Sunny, first as she came barking up to the car when I pulled into his drive-way. Sunny is a brown and white Australian Shepherd. Her colors were striking against her blue eyes. She was a very friendly dog and not at all shy as she allowed me to pet her and even sat herself down on my feet. I was petting Sunny when Ray came outside. Ray is in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down, as a result of a work injury almost ten years ago. He said hello, came up to me, shook my hand and that is when I saw another dog in his lap. This was Gypsy, his tiny, black Shorkie (a mix

between a Yorkie and a Shit-Zu). Ray has outfitted his home and his vehicles for wheelchair access. Gypsy spends a lot of time sitting in his lap being carted around.

Ray invited me into his home, but Sunny stayed outside. I asked to use his restroom and as I walked in, I turned around to close the door and found Gypsy at my feet. When we walked out together, Ray noticed her presence and apologized for her intrusion. I laughed and assured him it was nothing to concern himself with. He then offered me a seat on his large, dark green couch. My feet did not touch the ground and I sunk back into its cushions. He sat in his wheelchair to my right. Gypsy would move frequently between my lap, Ray's lap, and the arm of the couch where she could look out the large glass doors that led to the back yard. His home is one story. Its centerpiece is a double-sided brick fireplace that he later told me was hand-laid by his grandfather. Pictures of his children and grandchildren are hung on the dining room wall. He mentioned his granddaughter had named Gypsy.

Ray is 66 years old, divorced and lives with Gypsy and Sunny. After graduating from high school, he worked in the excavating business for many years. To supplement his income, he owns and rents out storage facilities near his home. You can see the home where he was born across the fields from his current home. His family is in the beagle business; breeding, raising and selling these dogs. Ray is an energetic man, rather fit, gregarious and insightful. He had a very thick southern accent and welcomed me warmly into his home, inviting me to stay for lunch.

Ray adopted Gypsy when she was just a puppy. She is now six years old. An affectionate dog, she sat on my lap multiple times during the interview. She enjoys playing with Ray and they make play time part of their daily routine. Sunny stays outside.

She is about a year old. Ray adopted Sunny six months ago from a local Humane Society. She enjoys playing catch and sitting on people's feet. As Sunny is a newer dog and spends the majority of her time outside, we spoke primarily of Ray's relationship with Gypsy.

Scott

I met Scott through another participant, Chip. He too is a professor of forestry at the University of Kentucky. He was born and raised in Michigan before his father was offered a job at the University of Kentucky in the English department in 1965. Scott obtained his Ph.D. from Purdue and moved back to Lexington after he completed the degree and took a job in the forestry department. He is 63 years old and has been with the university for 34 years. He was an Eagle Scout in his younger years and claims that the Lexington area is perfect for being a scout. He and his wife, Charlotte, have three grown children.

Scott is a very tall man, 6'4" with gray hair. He wears wire-rimmed glasses and has pale gray eyes. We met for the interview in his office in the forestry building. This building is one of the oldest on campus. His office is large with tall ceilings and many book cases. There is a small room adjacent to his office with a table and chairs. This is where we conducted the interview. Scott was a very jovial personality. He laughed frequently throughout our conversation and did not stop smiling. He was a curious participant asking me many questions about the study and what my findings were thus far. He seemed interested in research in an area that is quite different than his own. He was quick to tell a story and kept me interested for the two hours we were talking.

Scott had cats and dogs growing up. He had a dog named Shrimpy as a child that was the family dog. Shrimpy died when he was at Purdue. After Scott was married he and his wife decided to adopt a hound, Manny, from the Lexington Humane Society. Manny died from cancer in 2011 at the age of nine. They adopted their present dog, Ginny almost two years after Manny's death. Ginny is the only dog in the home but shares her space with two humans and a cat.

Each of these men has shared with me the intricacies of their relationship with their past and current dogs. The uniqueness of the bond between men and their dogs has been long-standing. The men who participated in this study are contributing to this history of the bond between men and their dogs by illuminating their present and past experiences with their canine companions.

Table 4.1 summarizes the characteristics of my study participants with respect to age, marital status, ethnicity, level of education, and their dog(s). All names here and throughout this dissertation are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of those involved in the study.

Table 4.1 Study Participants

Participant	Age	Income	Marital Status	Ethnicity	Education Level	Dog/s
Norman	72	70K+	Married	Caucasian	High School	Lexi and Bear
Vernon	72	70K+	Married	Caucasian	High School	Zeus, Amelia, Cozette
James	72	70K+	Married	Caucasian	Ph.D.	Lucy, Stella, Minnie
Warren	66	70K+	Married	Caucasian	High School	Peaches
John	63	70K+	Married	Caucasian	Undergraduate Degree	Roxie, Charlotte, Ruby (deceased)
Chip	63	70K+	Married	Caucasian	Ph.D.	Teddy, Lucky
Larry	65	25-40K	Married	Caucasian	Master's	Charlie
Jack	68	70K+	Married	Caucasian	Master's	Bear (deceased), Cosmo, Oscar
Carter	62	70K+	Married	Caucasian	Undergraduate Degree	Freyja, Atlas
David	70	70K+	Single/ Cohabiting	Caucasian	Ph.D.	Woofy
Ray	66	40-55K	Divorced	Caucasian	High School	Gypsy, Sunny
Scott	63	70K+	Married	Caucasian	Ph.D.	Ginny, Shrimpy (deceased), Manny (deceased)

Chapter Five: The Current Relationship

The meaning of the relationship between older adult men and their dogs is the subject of this study. The relationships these men experience with their dogs give the men a sense of appreciation for life and purpose through caring for their dog(s) in their later years. The previous chapters detailed the rationale for this study as related to a lack of men as subjects in the present human-animal bond literature as well as what I believe to be an over-reliance on Bowlby's attachment theory to explain the nature of the bond. This chapter will situate these men within their present relationship with their dog(s). The attachment between the men and their dogs is manifest and maintained by the activities they experience with their dog(s). These activities are walking their dog(s); playing with their dog(s); and just being with their dog(s). Cumulatively, these activities create a routine, which affects a significant portion of the time these men share with their dog(s). Each of the activities the men engage in with their dog(s) is discussed in detail. The maintenance and manifestation of these activities and subsequent routine serve to influence the development of the emotional bond. The quotes from this chapter came from the individual interviews with the men and do not contain quotes from the panel discussions.

Activities with the Dog

"Love, love, love, says Percy.
And hurry as fast as you can
along the shining beach, or the rubble, or the dust.

Then, go to sleep.
Give up your body heat, your beating heart.
Then, trust."

Mary Oliver

Activities with their dog(s) are both a manifestation of the attachment the men feel toward their dog(s) and are also key factors in the development of the emotional bond the men feel toward their dog(s). Each activity serves to create and maintain a routine for these men and their dogs, which helps to maintain the significance of their relationship. The first activity is walking with their dog(s).

Walking

Seven of the 12 men walk their dogs. The other five do not walk their dogs due to having acres of fenced-in property on rural land where they allow the dogs to run free on the safety of their property. These acres of fenced-in property combined with safety concerns with walking their dogs along rural roads has led the men to be disinclined to walk their dogs. One participant, in addition to the above aforementioned concerns, also lives with a physical disability that makes walking his dogs unsafe for both himself and his dogs. Chip has two large dogs, Lucky, a Great Pyrenees and Teddy, a Lab-Chow mix. Chip walks them separately every day during the week. He also has separate parks he takes the dogs on weekends. Lucky goes to one park on Saturday and Teddy goes to another park on Sunday. Their walks during the week are individual. Chip explains why he takes extra time and effort to walk his dogs separately.

> "I try to take them together, but that's hard. Some dogs are sight oriented and some are scent oriented, (meaning they either want to see everything there is to see or smell everything there is to smell). It's hard. It's hard to do. I have neighbors who do that. They enjoy the same thing. My dogs are very different dogs. It's a struggle. I enjoy it more if we go one at a time. I think they enjoy it more. It's relaxing for me if I walk half an hour with each of them. It's good for both of us. We like Woodland Park. It's a great place to walk dogs. If Teddy wants to go find a squirrel I let him go. He can't get into any trouble, gives him some autonomy, gives me some control."

Chip has embraced each of his dogs' individual natures and sees these separate walks as no inconvenience to him. He believes taking the time for both dogs individually benefits the dogs as well as his individual relationship with them. While Chip walks his dogs every day and this is a physical activity for all involved, it is more a reflection of his recognizing the different intrinsic natures of his dogs, accepting them, and giving them the opportunity to express those natures with their owner.

Jack reflected on walking Winston when he was a puppy. This would have been 14 years ago as Winston passed away in April of 2017. Jack's wife lives with myasthenia gravis and was often unable to take Winston for walks. As a result of her condition, Jack was in charge of Winston's walks. Jack refers to the walks as "pulls" meaning that he was not walking Winston, but that Winston was pulling on his leash and therefore pulling Jack along. This interaction now serves as a fond memory of time spent together before Winston passed away.

> "When he was little we'd walk all the time, well, we'd go on pulls, he'd pull the whole time…ha-ha. He'd try. I tried to get him to fetch a ball, he would not fetch a ball. I took him to the baseball field, I closed the gates, let him off his leash, and he'd sit right there beside me and I'd say, 'Go get the ball' and he'd look at me. I'd go get the ball, say, 'Fetch it.' We'd go get the ball, he'd look at me, and threw it a 3rd time I said that's enough of this ha-ha…. He was telling me, 'You was the one who threw it, you go get it.' Ha-ha…I didn't mind doing it. We just went for pulls."

Jack was able to form a meaningful interaction with Winston through the act of "pulling." He also attempted to play the game of fetch, but Winston would have none of it. Border Collies are often known for their stubborn nature and it seems Winston was the epitome of the breed. Jack smiled when telling me this story.

When I asked Carter about time he spends with his golden retriever, Freyja he said,

> "I will take her for a walk. And I'll take her at least three times a day, and she adores it. It's good for me to walk. I walk her all the time. If I walk her early, and she sees a rabbit, she'll try to lunge at them. I remember one morning, she saw one, it was early in her tenure with us, she was at the end of a leash, and she stood up on her hind legs, she stood there for at least ten seconds, looking at that rabbit. But she's very well behaved on a walk. She sees a rabbit, unless she's really interested, she used to go crazy with birds…but now…she's ok."

Although the activity of dog walking is included here, it is presented in a manner with the purpose of emphasizing the inimitable dynamics of each man's relationship with his dog. For these men and their dogs, walking is a multi-purpose activity. It serves to offer some physical activity for Chip, but also gives him the chance to pay individual attention to each of his dogs. Jack is unable to walk Winston now but did so for 14 years. Carter has noticed the progression of Freyja's behavior on their morning walks. These walks give the men the opportunity to spend time with their dogs and observe their behavior and spend quality time with them. A second area of activity for these men and their dog(s) is playing.

Playing

Norm and his wife fenced in two acres of their 11-acre property to give their dogs a safe place to play.

> "The St. Bernard (Bear), which is younger has decided that he wants to take me outside to play and he don't take no for an answer, he's big, weighs as much as I do, so we temper that. He and I are working through that. But he will just come and get me if he just can't stand it anymore, he'll have a period where he has to have about 30 minutes of activity and then he's pretty much done for the day. The 30 minutes, if you don't give him that 30 minutes, well he's like an annoying partner. He'll whine and cry and come and grab your pant leg."

> "He (Bear) thinks I'm a stuffed toy. He likes to play rough, which is my fault, from when he was little. So he'll bang into me, he won't jump up on you, and I made sure that didn't happen when he was young 'cause he is so

> big. But you can tell from his face that he just thoroughly enjoys being around me. Or whoever, he's a people dog."

When Norm and both Lexi and Bear are outside with him, the dynamic of the interaction between the three of them changes. Norm feels that Lexi is jealous of Bear when Norm and Bear play together and will find a way to work her way into their play-time.

> "She (Lexi) doesn't growl, now sometimes if Bear gets out of hand, she doesn't like it if he gets too rough with me, she will interject herself between him and me. I think she's jealous. She will get between him, herd him out, then come back and be by my side. He thinks it's cool cause he obeys her, he'll play like he's going to run into me and then veer off, and they'll play like that for 20 to 30 minutes."

Ray has two dogs, Sunny and Gypsy. Gypsy spends most of her time indoors with Ray, while Sunny lives primarily outdoors. When asked what he likes about Gypsy, he replied,

> "I like the interaction, we play ball every night, she does tricks, and she's still learning to do tricks, you can teach an old dog to do tricks, she's not old…she likes to play don't you (speaking to Gypsy), do you like to play, answer me, (Gypsy barks twice), well ok you should have answered me the first time. Any time from seven pm she will start following me around. She'll wag her tail, she wants to play. You wanting to play huh, you want to play, want to do a trick (speaking to Gypsy), what do you want, want her to do a trick with you? Alrighty, shh, hush, here, roll over, Gypsy, Gypsy, roll over (Gypsy rolls over on command). Dance, dance…ok, walk, turn, walk, turn, turn, come on, turn, turn…good job. Now, here, bang, I'm gonna shoot you, bang… (Gypsy falls over). Good girl!"

Ray may be the exemplary participant who plays with their companion animal. Although confined to a wheelchair because of his spinal cord injury, he is able to "talk" with Gypsy, have her play dead after he "shoots" her, and even dance with her. Ray was proud of the training he has achieved with Gypsy and its effect on their ability to play

together in this way. A third area of activity for these men and their dog(s) is being with them.

Being With

Jack was sitting in his favorite chair while we discussed the significance of Winston's presence in his life. This was auspicious as he reached his arm over his chair and "petted" the space Winston would have inhabited if he were still alive. Discussing him frequently brought tears to Jack's eyes throughout the conversation. I asked him what was special about Winston and this question brought about a short description of Winston's constant presence in Jack's life.

> "He was my boy….I don't know, I really don't… to be honest with you. He was always there. Always there. He usually just sat right here (next to his chair), I'd pet him him…He just sat there and got scratched. He'd turn around and look at me, tell me to do some more, I'd tell him that's enough and he'd go lay on his bed, he'd come back in about five minutes."

Scott has one dog, Ginny, whom he's had for four years now. I asked him what he looks for in a dog,

> "I like the dog who is curled up at your feet while you're reading the newspaper, drinking a scotch and smoking a pipe. You know, I want a companion dog. Ha-ha, 'cause you know you want to interact with a dog when you want to relax. That's part of the reason I have the dog. It's a sure companion. It's just a nice homey feeling that some other presence is there. No matter how bad your day has been, that muzzle lying on your leg…yeah. Everything is fine. And I don't care, I'm your dog."

Scott's response not only answered my question but explained *that* he enjoys her presence and *how* he enjoys her presence.

> "But there's a certain feeling of security, she's there. I think the dog feels that as well, and we feel that about the dog. We're not really alone, the dog doesn't have to be with you all the time, but it's there."

In his individual interview, David began to speak of being with Woofy and her desire for touch. He started to cry when speaking of her in this way.

> "She (Woofy) really craves physical contact, um, so, if you're sitting on the couch, she wants to be on the couch next to you most of the time. She sleeps in our bed, so she basically constant body contact with you at night, she likes that, she moves willfully to ensures that that contact occurs, and I can actually feel a change in my heart rate when that happens (crying)."

After David had composed himself, he said,

> "We (speaking of himself and his partner) think she wants to be with us and so we have those times where we are in the same place together. If we go out to the back yard, she goes out to the back yard. If we go in, she comes in."

The presence of a companion animal, the security of a dog and the physical act of petting a dog all contribute to what these men look for in a companion animal dog. It is often the physical activities that are mentioned as being beneficial to one's health as a result of having a dog (Cutt et al., 2007; Johnson & Meadows, 2010), but for these men, simply having a dog present was reason enough to obtain and care for a companion animal dog.

Chip appreciates the natures of his dogs and takes the time to encourage the expression of their uniqueness by taking them on individual walks. Their walks are more than a means with which to gain some physical exercise; they are a means to enjoy nature with the dogs whether nature is in the form of a squirrel, a branch or an unidentified scent. Norm feels Bear needs 30 minutes of play each day before Bear is done with this activity. Lexi is included in this play time and the three of them play together. Ray engages Gypsy in play and has trained her to "play dead" when he "shoots" her and she will dance for him on her hind legs when asked. Jack claimed to enjoy the time he spent

with Winston while he was sitting and watching Television in his favorite chair and Winston was sitting close enough to him to be petted by Jack. Scott enjoys having a dog simply due to having another presence in his home at the end of the day that he claims is relaxing. Scott also mentions how he is never alone due to the presence of Ginny. David is profoundly affected by the presence of Woofy and has even noticed in himself a change in his heart rate as a result of her physical presence.

One cumulative result of these activities between the men and their dogs is that these activities take place frequently and therefore have become part of the men's established daily routine.

Routine

The activities in which the men engage with their dog(s) are part of the daily routine these men experience with their dog(s). These routines are a noteworthy aspect of what constitutes a significant portion of the men's day. For instance, Chip walks his dogs twice a day during the week and takes them to the same parks on the weekends for walks. Ray claimed that every evening at seven, Gypsy would follow him around until he played with her. The impact of the loss of a routine on Jack's emotions may indicate the significance of a routine with companion animals in one's life. Carter explicitly explained his daily routine with walking his dogs to me. Neither Carter nor his wife are retired, but both have non-traditional work schedules. Because of this, they manage to walk their dogs three times a day.

> "First thing in the morning, I get up and I walk her (Freyja), and when I get home from the TV station around three I walk her again, and when I get home again about nine or 10, I walk her again. And then I might walk Atlas with her, and my wife will walk with us on the middle walk. I will walk them both if she's got work to do."

David's routine with Woofy involves physical care as well as leisure time. I asked David if he spent a lot of time walking Woofy around his neighborhood and his response reflected a shared routine for Woofy's care with his partner, Annette.

> "So my responsibility is to get up with her in the morning, and feed her the morning meal, so she gets to go out before breakfast and after breakfast. I get her up and out and take her and feed her and take her out an hour or so after she's eaten. Then we screw around with her during the day in various ways, and Annette is responsible for the late afternoon meal and the late afternoon walk, so most times she's out with one of us, but sometimes we go together."

Scott mentions how his previous dog, Manny, created a routine with him that he now misses since she died in 2012. His latest dog, Ginny, has her own routine with Scott that seems to please him.

> "It's a good pause in the evening, time to walk the dog, see what's going on. And when Manny died, I missed that routine, I missed that activity. It does tend to be become a routine. She (Ginny) gets me up in the morning, I go let her out, I feed them, I go to the bathroom, get the papers, let her in again. Ha-ha…. I think companion animals like routine, I've come convinced dogs, Saturday is always interesting and the dog is always in my armpit, well it's Saturday and you're used to going out now. It gives them a degree of stability and security, but beyond that, are they attached to you or the security or do they make the connection that you are the source of that security. And I think they like you around above and beyond that."

In this chapter I have described meaningful activities these men engage in with their dogs including walking, playing and being with them, and how the frequency of these activities results in a shared routine for the men and their dogs. It is these activities and subsequent routine as a result of the activities that affect the relationship and influence the development of the bond shared between the men and their dogs. Rarely did the men discuss with me the negative aspects of pet ownership, although such realities of maintenance, responsibility, training and investment of time were offhandedly

mentioned, they were with the caveat that all of these realities of pet ownership were worth the inconvenience they posed. In the next chapter I will describe the mental elements that are another manifestation of my participants' attachment to their dog(s) and that furthers the development of the bond.

Chapter Six: Probing Deeper into the Relationship

The previous chapter detailed activities these men engage in with their dogs. Their accounts of walking, playing and "being with" their dogs led them to develop routines. This chapter will focus on significant mental elements that are manifestations of the attachment they feel toward their dog(s) and that serves to develop an emotional bond with them. The emotional element is characterized by four things: Considering the dog to be family; recognizing cross-species commonalities/anthropomorphism; a "pack mentality;" and feelings of responsibility toward the dog(s).

Ways of Thinking

They are Family

All of the men in this study consider their dog(s) to be family members. Peaches is the first dog Warren has had in his adult life. He and his wife had a cat before Peaches arrived but due to Warrens' work situation, living away from home during the week, he had never owned a dog. Before retirement, Warren worked in a coal mining area of Eastern Kentucky and claims to have interacted with stray dogs that would wander in. He fed those dogs but did not consider them to be a family member. What influenced his thinking of Peaches as his family was bringing her into his home. This act of inclusion was, for many of the men, a defining factor in their ability to develop a bond with their dogs. I asked if having a dog share his home with him made a difference in his feelings toward her and he replied,

> "Well it does you know. I never had a house dog. You get close to them. Like at home, in the house, the way I feel. They're there all the time. She's part of the family. The longer we keep her, it (the emotional attachment) is going to get stronger. I wouldn't take nothing for her…there's no

> money….she's been something. I never would have thought…never…you just get really close to them."

What has made the difference for Warren in his ability to see Peaches as family and not those stray dogs in the coal fields is that Peaches is a constant in Warren's life by living with him in his home, sharing the space with him in the form of a family member.

Vernon was very explicit in his viewing Zeus as his family member, calling him his "son." He expressed a similar sentiment to Warren, feeling that Zeus is his family member because he lives with Vernon in his home.

> "Oh yeah, yeah, it's like a child, he's my child. I mean he really and truly is attached to me. Half the time I carry him around. When I get up in the morning he gets shoved into my house coat. I put him in my shirt too. A lot of the time he asks for that. He's always close to his daddy. He's so special, so bonded to me. He's totally locked into me. We are really like father and son stuff here. When they live with you in your house as a family member, they are treated like family members."

Norm's dogs primarily live indoors with him and his wife. When asked about what instigated his deep connection with Lexi he said,

> "It does sound ridiculous, but Lexi is the first and only dog I've ever felt that way about (his connection to her). Why did I fall in love with her? The dog came in, come over, put her head on my knee, looked at me, and I mean, I felt probably the closest thing to love that you could. And for a dog! It actually kind of scared me. But I mean you couldn't rip that dog away from me and I think the world of her. They just become part of the family. You know they're family when you go through the hallway and say excuse me to the dog. Ha-ha. There have been so many I've been attached to, but it's like family members, all different reasons at different times."

For Norm, falling in love with Lexi was the first step to considering her a member of his family.

Larry had lost his dog, Charlie, before our interview, and since we met, Larry has passed away from cancer. When I interviewed him, he was reserved and spoke of Charlie in an almost regretful manner. I asked him about her. He replied,

> "Charlie was the one (dog) we had the longest. They (companion animals) kind of become family. Make sure you do the right thing by them, get them trained, teach them how to interact with humans. I took her to puppy kindergarten."

Larry had a whimsical smile on his face despite the tone of regret in his voice. He continuously looked over my shoulder at nothing in moments of silence. I almost felt remorse when asking him to discuss his lost dog.

When Carter spoke of his dogs, Freyja and Atlas, in the context of their being family, he said,

> "Oh yeah. My wife has two kids and a grandson and I have two kids, but we talk about the dogs like they are *our* kids. Like what have they gotten into, what did they do? It's funny and it's fun, we love the dogs."

David agreed that Woofy is his family member, and an important one at that.

> "Absolutely she is. We adjust our schedules to meet her needs. When we do something, we think of what impact this will have on Woofy, so it changes what we will do because we want to take care of her first. So in many ways she is our highest priority. We would change things in our life in order to make her life more comfortable."

Many companion animal owners consider their companion animals to be family members (Cohen, 2002; Shir-Vertesh, 2012). These men are no different. The manifestations of those feelings toward their dog being a family member are all different. David became quite emotional when discussing Woofy, even crying on different occasions, whereas Larry was very stoic. Carter was joyful, claiming it was fun to talk about Freyja and Atlas like they are family members. Vernon was the only participant who referred to his dog as a "son." The relationships these men have with their dog(s)

began by bringing them into their homes and treating them like family. Carter's dogs may be special to him as a result of him and his wife's kids no longer being in the home. For instance, the dogs have given him the opportunity to extend his role of a nurturer and provider now that his kids are grown and raised.

Recognizing Cross-Species Commonalities/Anthropomorphizing

The definition of anthropomorphizing is the tendency to attribute human traits to a non-human animal (Serpell, 2002). An example of this is Vernon calling his dog his "son" or saying, "He's always close to his daddy." All of the men either anthropomorphized and/or demonstrated their recognition of cross-species commonalities. I argue that it is difficult for these men to not do so when discussing their dog(s). For these men, both behaviors seemed to happen subconsciously. Even David, who feels companion animal owners should not anthropomorphize, did so multiple times throughout his personal interview and in the panel discussions. Presented are a few examples of how these men either used cross-species recognition or anthropomorphized when discussing their dog(s).

Ray lost his partner a few years ago and speaks of how Gypsy was attached to her and how he feels Gypsy misses her,

> "I mean she cared as much about the lady as I did. She wouldn't do nothing for two weeks. She missed her horribly."

When Ray was attending a rehab facility after his accident he discussed how he felt Gypsy missed him and thought he might be dead.

> "She (Gypsy) got older and I was gone (for physical therapy) for like two to three weeks, I figured she'd be so excited when I came home, I figured she thought I was gone or dead. They brought her up there (to the facility) to see me and I thought she'd go wild, but she didn't. She saw me and she

> just walked up and sat down and put her head between my legs and just looked at me. Just like, 'I thought I would never see you again."

Warren takes Peaches to a boarding kennel when he and his wife leave for a long day but has some reservations about doing so. He said of her behavior not long after they had adopted her,

> "To be honest with you, there for a while she wouldn't even bark. I don't know if she was just more comfortable…I guess it was being around us and new people, not knowing what we were going to do. We started playing with her, feeding her good, she came across. And then, I assume, it's probably because she was scared. Like I say, we take her to Pet Suites, she just gets all nervous, like thinking we're not coming back to get her. Maybe she thinks about that. Maybe she thinks we're going to give her up. She looks at you like, 'are you coming back?'"

Warren had tears in his eyes when discussing these infrequent occasions when he and his wife board Peaches over a long day trip.

When I asked Chip why he chose to keep dogs as his companion animals he explained,

> "They're friends. We enjoy each other's company, that's apparent to me and the dog. The dogs like me. They come up from the basement glad to see me. They want to go on a walk. I treat them well and they're happy they have a home. They appreciate it, but it goes beyond that. I'm loved like crazy…'Chip's back! Chip's back!'"

Part of what may influence Norm's attachment to Lexi, "his dog" is exemplified in one simple statement he made during our interview.

"She obviously thinks I'm the best!"

David's thoughts on the function of anthropomorphizing in the development of the human-animal bond are,

> "I don't know. My guess is humans, I think we only see things through the filter of our own experiences, so if we can't imagine what somebody is thinking or feeling, then we can't imagine it. And if we can't imagine it…so

> yeah, I suppose we superimpose on almost everything, our own personal baggage and perception."

While there was debate among the men, and even within themselves, about the legitimacy of anthropomorphizing, they all do it. Anthropomorphizing was debated in the second panel meeting. David was the first to respond to the question of what purpose anthropomorphizing serves.

> "Is it possible that we ascribe human emotion to our companion animals and human feelings or human motivations to our companion animals, because it's the only language we have? It's the only way we know how to describe something? In terms of human reactions or interaction. We have a dog who is looking at us and I think, I love that dog, and it's looking at me in a kindly way, at least what I see as kindly or loving way, then when it does something it's because it loves me?"

To which Jack responded, "We make them humans." Vernon said anthropomorphizing serves the purpose of, "For a bonding issue, I have a pal, a buddy, a friend, not a dog." Chip was adamant that anthropomorphizing did not need to serve any purpose. He feels the factor that affects anthropomorphizing, specifically whether or not humans can empathize or sympathize with an animal, is the animal's level of intellect.

> "Why does it (anthropomorphizing) need to serve any purpose? I think it's the same for any intelligent creature though, otherwise you wouldn't have trainers at SeaWorld. And the way they bond with the Orcas down there. I raised a blue jay onetime, it was smarter than hell. But there wasn't the bond there that I have with the dog."

He went on to explain,

> "I mean I can recognize a different kind of intelligence, but it's not something that is mutual. That's a big part of it for me. The Blue jay, I released it, it left, come back. Ok, it went out grabbed a grub, came back. There was some level of intellect there. But we weren't emotionally attached."

For Chip, intelligence does not equate to reciprocity of emotions and therefore no emotional bond was developed with the Blue jay. There may have been some attachment between Chip and the Blue jay, but no emotional bonding.

Norm felt that the type of animal, such as one being domesticated or wild was the primary factor in our tendency to anthropomorphize.

> "Yeah, I think a dog and a cat, something domesticated, you know wild animals, I had cases where people kept squirrels too long, well after a certain period of time they become neurotic, they reach sexual maturity, they will bite you, whereas dogs are here to stay forever as long as it's a good home. Whereas with wildlife it's not. The attachment is one-way, dogs and cats, it's two-way"

Another manifestation of attachment that influences the emotional bond these men develop with their dog(s) is the idea of a "pack mentality." This is related to anthropomorphizing as will become apparent by the men's statements.

Pack Mentality

The idea of pack mentality is that the men see their dog(s) as being part of their pack and they perceive the dogs as thinking that the men are part of their dog(s) pack. This perception is an example of zoomorphism. Zoomorphism is recognizing a non-human animal behavior, such as a pack mentality, and applying it to the relationship with companion animals. This is similar to anthropomorphizing and in fact, both anthropomorphism and zoomorphism both influence and are influenced by the other. Vernon tended to speak of this "pack mentality" when explaining to me in our individual interview why his bond with Zeus is so strong and how the two of them maintain a connection.

> "It's all about the pack. Zeus and I are a pack. Dogs are pack animals so it works better than an independent animal. If you want to find me, find the Yorkie, and if you want to find the Yorkie, find me."

David also referenced "pack mentality" in our individual interview when he said,

> "I really don't know what dogs think or feel, but we're part of her pack and she's part of ours."

Chip situates himself as the leader of the pack and claimed that is the way the dogs prefer it to be. He discussed this in the panel discussion.

> "I always have to be the leader of the pack. I had a tri-colored fox hound, the one I got in Mississippi. He was very much this is his territory, this is his pack, he will defend you to the death…in terms of a pack structure, whether it's with me or my wife or with the cats, it's a pack type of structure that they (dogs) are content and happy with."

Scott spoke of his current dog's place in the pack,

> "She (Ginny) has her place and is accepted in that place, knows her place, and everybody is cool with that. Her (Ginny), me, the whole thing. I've heard they need a pack. We're their pack, the definition of a pack."

The final way of thinking about their dogs is their feeling responsible to provide a high quality of life for their dog(s) through providing them with what they feel is quality care.

Responsibility for Care

The responsibility that comes with caring for companion animals is an accepted reality for companion animal owners. These men have strived to ensure the physical and emotional quality of life for their dog(s).

James discusses the difficulties many companion animal owners face and a decision he made 35 years ago with a dog he had in our individual interview,

> "About 35 years ago, we had a Cockapoo who got pregnant and had some other little poos or something, ha ha, we're not sure, but we ended up with our original dog plus a pup, and the pup was a year or two old and they both got hit by a car at the same time, the pup was killed and the mother, no, the mother was killed, sorry, one followed the other out into the street, so the pup had both hip sockets slipped off. So we had an interesting choice, this

> was 35 years ago. So, she could either have surgery, somewhere to 500 to 1,000 dollars, or just let it go and she will heal. And she did. Yeah, now, it took longer than if we had surgery. But she learned how to pull herself around on her front paws, and eventually she started walking again, amazingly enough. I'm not sure now that I would do that, I'd go for the surgery now. Like we're doing now with the cancer surgery. Chemotherapy, I don't know. Maybe if she was a pup. I think the way we'd look at it, I'm projecting, if she would live a few more years with a good quality of life, then yes, but if she was going to be sick, I'd have to think about that. I do understand the conundrum for companion animal owners. It's hard."

James's story emphasizes how his idea of proper companion animal care has changed in the 35 years since he lost the mother dog and decided against treatment for her pup. Norm mentions in our individual interview how things may change with regard to companion animal care depending on the reality of the situation of the companion animal owner.

> "You have to make choices, thankfully we're at a point where we don't need to make those choices. We can afford the vet care. Cancer care for a dog, are you really doing the dog a favor? What about going into debt? Everybody has different choices to make. Reality makes a difference."

David explained to me in our individual interview how he and his partner share responsibility of care for Woofy in terms of feeding times and walks. David is retired and this enables him to spend more time caring for Woofy's physical needs.

> "Our house is strange in many ways, so we divide responsibilities. We adjusted our schedules to meet her needs, we always were serious about taking good care of her, were responsive to her medical demands, although they were not great, we were sincere and committed to being good dog owners, we took our responsibility of having a companion animal very seriously."

Woofy is the only companion animal David and his partner have had since they adopted Woofy when she was one year old. She is now 12.

Norm mentions the commitment it takes to care for dogs and likens it to a psychological component.

> "It takes commitment, but I think that's one of the things where you get a psychological thing where certain people won't take care of their kids and animals, but if you really love your animal, well the commitment is I've got to take care of this dog as long as it lives, unless something drastic happens, but I wouldn't think about giving away one of my dogs just as I wouldn't my son."

Norm is also well aware of how his dogs' mental health is an important aspect of their quality of life. He ensures that they are well-socialized to prevent them from being too spoiled from Norm and Anne's constant presence. Both Norm and Anne are retired and spend the majority of their day with their dogs. Norm likened them to children who spend 24 hours a day with a caregiver who spoils them.

> "I think, because these two dogs, we have had since we've been retired, since these dogs know nothing else, and not around kids, and we're there all the time. It's also one of the dangers, taking them to day care, they get so needy, they will go psycho on you. I mean they need to be pet and touched every minute, so you need to know, like the kids, you need to leave for a while… So, and then too, it's important to get them to where they need to be boarded for a short period of time."

The elements mentioned in this chapter focus on the ways in which the men think about the position of their dog(s) in relation to themselves and the other members of their families, that serves to bring them emotionally closer to their dog(s). Seeing the dog as a family member is as close as a dog can be to its human members. In order to think of a dog as a member of the family, one must anthropomorphize. Recognizing cross-species commonalities and anthropomorphizing are two of the most significant components at work for the men. Chip spoke of how the intellect of an animal made the animal relatable to him. He used a Blue Jay he had as an example, claiming that while the animal was intelligent, he did not form an emotional bond with it.

The men are also utilizing zoomorphic behaviors when they think of the dog(s) as part of their pack or believing that the dog(s) see them as part of their pack. For Vernon,

anthropomorphizing serves the purpose of making a dog a family member, while for Chip, it serves no purpose. The responsibility the men feel toward providing for their dog(s)' care demonstrates an accepted willingness to commit financially, emotionally and even physically to the care of the dog(s), something the men here are willing to do, knowing full-well the sacrifices that may accompany that commitment. One last aspect that affects these men's relationships with their dogs is the reality of loss as they have all experienced the death of a dog, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Loss

In the previous chapter I detailed how the attachment the men feel toward their dogs is partly manifest and maintained by their ways of thinking about their dogs by viewing the dogs as family members, the men's recognizing cross-species commonalities and their tendency to anthropomorphize, the idea of a pack mentality, and feelings of responsibility of care. These ways of thinking about and expressing their attachment to their dogs contribute to the difficulty they have experienced when they have lost one to death. The bonds with their dog(s) has been shaken to its core when they lost a dog to death. Whether sudden loss occurs, as in the case of an accident, or a loss that is planned through euthanizing, the loss of a dog is often a traumatic experience, one that affects the interactions and emotional bond that men may develop with subsequent dogs. Experiences and emotional implications and expressions of loss are detailed here in order to further build on describing the dynamics of attachment and the bond the men feel for their dog(s). First, I begin with each of the men's experience with loss by relaying their stories of loss, often involving decisions they had to make concerning euthanizing their dog(s). I then describe the outcomes of loss on subsequent bonds with dog(s) and the men's views of their own aging and mortality. Finally, I discuss the outcome of being an older adult man on their views of loss.

Experience with Loss

"Dogs come into our lives to teach us about love, they depart to teach us about loss. A new dog never replaces an old dog, it merely expands the heart. If you have loved many dogs your heart is very big." Erica Jong

Stories

James has had multiple experiences with loss over his life span. Here, he tells the participants in the third panel discussion a story of a loss that occurred over 60 years ago. He remembers vividly the loss of his dog, Biscuit.

> "I got my first dog when I was eight years old, she was a toy collie, and she and I were together every waking moment. Um, my mother was working at a Howard Johnson's, night shift, so the family piled into the car and, Biscuit was her (the dog's) name, and she piled in with us and we went to pick up mom at the Howard Johnson's and it was on a main throughway. A four lane. Lots and lots of traffic and while we were waiting for my mom, um, Biscuit had to go, so we opened the door, there were three of us boys and we were playing and so forth and so on, we forgot about her. And the, my mom showed up got in the car, off we went. Got home, where's the dog? So, we went back to Howard Johnson's and she had tried to follow us [crying] and there she was on the side of the road. I can still see her lying here. Never forget it and I'll never get over it. Whenever we lose one I go right back to that. I didn't have a dog again for about 20 years. I was 11 at the time. Actually, it was longer than that, 25 years. I just couldn't stand the thought of ever losing one and I still can't stand it [crying]."

James was unable to convey any more stories of loss to me as he was overcome with grief and said, "That was the easy one [story]." David also spoke to the group of a loss of a dog in his childhood.

> "I think for many of us, as young individuals, it's our first time in our lives where we've experienced a loss. We don't lose a parent, usually, or a brother or sister or something, or somebody who is dear to us, maybe a grandparent or something, but for many of us losing a family pet is the first experience with loss we have. I was 7 or 8 when I lost my first dog. It was a devastating thing. I couldn't believe the dog was gone. She was going to the vet, was going to come back fine, she went to the vet and they put her down. She was going to be OK and the next minute she was gone."

John, who could not attend the panel discussions, experienced the loss of a previous dog, Stanley, after an extended period of decline in his companion animal's health. Stanley

was physically unwell and deteriorating, but mentally sound, leaving John with a conundrum.

> "Stanley was mentally sharp, his eating never changed. In retrospect we let it go on too long. You don't know that, and you know he would know if you took him off to the vet, so we couldn't hardly bring ourselves to it. We were looking for another sign, but when he quit eating we knew it was time."

John had many stories of loss, this one of losing Stanley was one of six losses he has experienced in the last two years.

Carter spoke to me of two experiences of loss.

> "I had a rescue, an Australian shepherd mix, Derby. He could jump a fence like a deer. I thought he was inside one night, I was playing cards, he was outside and he jumped a fence, chased a cat into the street…yeah… with Derby I was angry with myself, more angry than anything. He was a wonderful dog, a lot of personality. It was unfortunate."

> "Oh, I cried like a baby when I lost my golden down in Dallas. Yeah, it was my fault when I put Turkey down, I remember thinking, well maybe I will have him until Christmas, maybe I'll have him until September, or April. I had to put him down then. He couldn't walk, I had to hold him up so he could relieve himself. And I thought, I'm being selfish. So, when I put him down he was out of his misery, and I felt bad for him. You know what I mean? But you know, who knows when the right time is. It's a quality of life issue."

Individual stories of loss were shared in different emotional tones and either with me only or with the panel participants. James was openly tearful in the group; David was thoughtful and focused; and Carter spoke with a tone of regret and sadness in his voice. All of the men in the study experienced companion animal loss, sometimes accompanied by regret and guilt. Oftentimes, the stress of these experiences was compounded by the difficult decisions that had to be made including euthanizing their dogs.

Decisions about Loss

Responsibility

The men speak here of what a great responsibility being a companion animal owner can be when it comes to making a good decision concerning pain, suffering, and quality of life of their companion animal. Norm and Carter share similar sentiments of something they would do differently in the third panel discussion and individually, respectively, and Norm comments on how experience and age combined affect his perspectives on the appropriate time to euthanize a companion animal dog:

> "Yeah, the younger you are, the sort of you, you say I won't let that happen again. One of the first early dogs we had was a mini poodle. A gift from a family member, the sweetest dog, before we had kids, so he was our child. He died from cancer at 11 years old. Not old, but not young. We thought he'd get better, this was in the 1970's, so the vet said whatever, if he got bad enough we'd euthanize him, and I've got a picture today of him lying on the couch and I look at it and say that was the most miserable dog, bless his heart, if we had done the right thing, we'd have done it two weeks before we did. But he finally did just passed away in his sleep. But from his eyes, looking in his eyes, you could tell from his eyes he was just in pain, and uh, we kind of took that one and said, we won't do that again. But again, each generation of companion animals you become more mature and you kind of deal with it differently. We strive to not do that, don't be too quick on the trigger, but to not let them suffer."

John speaks of the pain his wife suffered watching Stanley slowly die. The added dimension of watching a spouse grieve over a companion animal dog for an extended period of time may have added to John's conflicting thoughts of when to euthanize Stanley.

> "I had never grieved over a dog like that. With Stanley my grieving occurred earlier, 18 months he went downhill. It tore my wife up big time. It did not me as much, he was my buddy, but over that 18-month period, it shifted. I felt before she did that we were letting it go on too long. But it tore her up."

I asked Larry if he struggled with grieving over his dog, Charlie, that had died and he said,

> "I don't think so. Usually it's because their health has deteriorated to the point where it's not humane to keep them. I don't think. Which is not to say we should treat humans that way."

Larry's feelings of responsibility toward his dog were of ensuring her quality of life and understanding that it was his job to treat her humanely, even when the time came to let her go.

Carter is adamant that as a result of his experience with a previous dog, Turkey, he will never let another companion animal dog of his suffer needlessly. He describes the struggle with the decision to euthanize a companion animal dog.

> "I think we have that responsibility because these animals can't communicate with us. They depend on us for everything. Everything. **Well the thing is, it's a result of how much you love them.** [my bold] It's not a 'yeah I'll do it tomorrow, I don't have the time today,' it's not like that at all. You know you will lose them, one way or another. I have already thought about that, after we had to put down Kiwi, I'm like, you know, I would almost rather she run away, but I don't want her to. But there will come a time when I have to make that drive, but like you said, that's when, and again, I won't make the same mistake I made with Turkey and maybe with Kiwi. I won't let them suffer."

All 12 of the men had stories of loss of their dogs. Some spoke of losing dogs as young boys and others have just recently lost a dog. All of them assume that they will lose the dogs for which they currently care. Despite the reality of losing a dog to death and the awareness that this will happen again, none of the men reported feeling regret for ever having their dogs. Each loss the men have experienced has influenced the manner in which they engage with and grieve over any subsequent dog(s) they choose to have.

Outcomes of Loss

How Loss Affects Subsequent Bonds with Dogs

Loss of previous dogs has affected these men's relationships with their current dog(s). For instance, Vernon is more aware of his impending loss of Zeus. He lost another Yorkie 14 years ago and is still affected by that loss today. He shared in the third panel discussion,

> "It's been 14 years and I still miss that dog. I miss what she did, I miss her company, I miss her personality, Zeus my present dog, it's going to be the same with him. He had all these things totally different, so different. Well he's 14 now. I'm looking, it's on my mind. He's starting to show it."

After losing Biscuit, James waited 25 years to get another dog. This was also shared in the third panel discussion.

> "Eventually I got over it [losing Biscuit], not over it, but was able to get a dog again, we've had dogs continuously since that time. But we've had other mishaps."

I specifically asked Chip in the third panel discussion if losing previous dogs affected how he interacts with his present dogs, Lucky and Teddy. He said,

> "You're making me think, I tell my dogs I love them a lot more than I ever did, I used to say good boy or I love you, I say that a whole lot more now. I think I'd feel guilty if I didn't say that and let them know that."

Arguably the most significant loss for John was losing Ruby. He feels he will never again experience the bond he had with her.

> "Then of course we lost Ruby. There will never be that relationship with me and another dog. I can't imagine it. It wasn't intentional, but I can't imagine it ever even unfolding like that again."

Jack reiterates and shared with me individually why he was reticent to adopt another dog after losing Winston,

> "I don't know if I want to go through that again or not. That was tough. You know, I cried more when Winston died than when my father died. He was my boy [pause]. I just miss him, just miss him [pause]. He's downstairs. We had him cremated, I talk to him every day. I just tell him bye when I leave and when I come back home. And then I don't want to go through that grief again. That was hard. That was tough. It's in cycles [the grief]. I wouldn't do it again, no. And you know, it's the grief."

I asked Carter in our individual interview about his thoughts on whether or not it was encouraging to know he could adopt another dog after his dogs have passed. He replied after much thought,

> "That's an interesting question…. uh, I think you can fill a void in your life, and there will be another smiling face at the top of the steps waiting for you, but obviously you can't replace what that particular dog brought to the table. So that's all part of it."

I also asked him how losing a dog affects his relationship with any subsequent dogs, to which he responded,

> "Oh sure…if you don't learn from your experience, you are myopic I think, regardless. And if you've had more than one dog, then clearly you've experienced what it feels like to lose one, so I think that would make you appreciate the next one more and learn from your mistakes, and you know, unfortunately I lost Derby early in his life, so I didn't have to make that decision that we talked about, but if and when now, I will know how to handle it better. I think I probably didn't fully appreciate it with my first dog."

John said of how Ruby has changed his perspectives of his relationships with his dogs,

> "Well, Ruby changed it. She changed my perception of dogs, you know, so, I will say, we always had a dog, but many years it was more like she was just another thing here in the house. My sons and wife, as a family, but it was busy, you know, so some periods I didn't pay much attention to the dogs. Now I pay way more attention to them and partly because of Ruby, not just her, moving to that second career changed that. It changed over time."

The men have each been affected by loss in different ways. James did not get another dog for 25 years after losing Biscuit, a dog he still grieves over today, and John now pays

more attention to his dogs. His ability to pay more attention to his dogs is due in part to two role changes in his life: One being his partial retirement, the other being his children no longer living in the home. These are two examples of how loss of previous dogs has affected how these men interact with their current dog(s), but it has also affected them in a much more personal and meaningful way.

How Loss Affects the Men

Losing a companion animal has influenced how these men view their own mortality; the value of others around them; and it seems to have provided a greater appreciation for all things living. I begin with some thoughts of John who was unable to make it to any of the panel meetings because of his work schedule. In our individual interview I asked him how reflecting on losing his dogs has changed his life. He spoke of Ruby,

> "I learned something about people because of Ruby. And I say in there [an essay he wrote about Ruby] I've never been around brokenness. You know people have broken lives all around. Some far worse than others. I had never known anyone who was not loved. And so my heart changed as a, well my time with Ruby. Because now I saw, there was a parallel, not to make it a bigger deal than it is, but a parallel in brokenness in people with Ruby. There is sort of an image there, and I appreciate it better just giving it, the title Space and Grace, so that was it. Yeah, it changed me… I don't want to trivialize people's problems, but again, I saw a parallel there, whether there was one there or not. I'm an engineer by training so I'm cerebral, and less of a feeling person. It's almost like my heart changed, being open to others who are in need, without discounting it."

Here is the essay John wrote as a submission to the local Humane Society that was asking for companion animal owners to write about how their companion animals had affected them.

Space and Grace

In my inbox was a photo from my wife: a scrawny wreck of a dog, tail between her legs. I ignored the email. You see, we had two wonderful Welsh Corgis. Did we need another dog? A second email and picture - about the homeliest dog I'd ever seen! - was followed by a third. "Aren't you going to respond?"

The dog was an older dog with missing teeth and "every parasite known to man" including heart worm, which had killed her brother. She had been chained outside all her life, the victim of a dog-hoarder. Given her history a veterinarian classified her a "red-dot" dog, a potential threat.

Nothing in this description was particularly encouraging. Did I mention that I didn't want another dog? Cut to Super Bowl Sunday, 2010--the day we brought "Ruby" home from the Woodford County Humane Society (and headed straight for a bath), the day which began a journey I could not have imagined or believed. Ruby changed my life.

As luck would have it, my work schedule had me home during those first few days while my wife was at work. Ruby herself had nothing to offer and rejected all I offered except food. But my instinct was to offer space and grace. Slowly she responded in almost imperceptible ways. I had never breathed the air of brokenness, and hadn't really experienced it vicariously in friends, much less in a family companion animal. I had never known a life of complete fear or deprivation of love, a life devoid of kindness and connection between beings. But like The Grinch, I felt my heart grow several sizes in those days.

Ruby taught us much. We began to learn from her the importance of openness and patience, the security in a consistent routine, the importance of clear boundaries but also the value of protection from scary situations. As Ruby watched intensely her adopted siblings and followed their lead, we learned the importance of role models. We learned to tolerate small inconveniences and idiosyncrasies as by-products of a broken spirit. We learned that healing takes years. From the insights gained by sharing my life with Ruby, I began to appreciate how a shortage of love also affects people. Maybe more space, more grace will help us too.

I'll never regret the six years we had with Ruby. Both her people and dog friends miss her, but especially me, who with time, became her first trusted human companion. In Ruby's honor we recently adopted a homeless puppy. This time I did not ignore my loving wife's urgings. The learning has begun anew.

His insight into his bond with Ruby and how her loss affected him was especially meaningful to him. He reveals himself as someone very much in touch with his feelings. His intuition concerning his bond with Ruby and her later loss that was so beautifully portrayed in his essay *Space and Grace* was permeated with deeply rooted emotions that pervaded John's living room as we sat there while he read what he had written out loud to me. It turned out that this was the first time he had shared this with anyone. Later in the interview, John allowed me to read a letter he had written to Ruby he had also written after she had passed. While not able to share this letter here because of John's request to keep it private, I was again, the first person who had the pleasure of reading John's eloquent and poignantly composed letter to his lost dog, Ruby. He explains the inspiration for and contents of the letter:

> "I'll tell you a bit more about Ruby. About the time I lost Ruby, a pastor friend of mine was talking about grief. And he was talking about five reflections of loss. And he suggested I do that with Ruby. Nobody has ever seen this, it's very personal. His five reflections are, first say thank you, thank you for [pause] and then I forgive you for these things, will you forgive me for these things [pause] and then I love you and then goodbye [spoken brokenly]."

The third and final panel discussion and the final minutes of that discussion were dedicated to open-ended questions on how losing their dog(s) has changed these men's lives in the broader context of being an older adult man. James, who had been sitting quietly for over an hour and holding a box of tissues next to his chest was the first to respond,

> "I told a couple of stories, I have four or five more that have happened at various points in my life and uh, each one of those um, I has helped make me who I am, for good or ill. I'm not sure I can point to a certain characteristic that I have more or less of because of these events, but I think that I may be one, I think I have more reverence for life than I would otherwise have. Cause once you've felt the love for a pet and felt that loss,

> and you've had it happen repeatedly, I think that does something to you. Um, I don't know if, it makes you have more empathy, but for me I think it certainly has accentuated over my life time a reverence for life. I'm a big believer in evolution and I see it as part of the continuing process and it's unforgiving, it's inexorable and there's a direction to it and it's all part of that flowing river. That's my take. It's the circle of life."

Chip went directly after James. His response was very reflective of the effect his dogs have had on his concern for life.

> "I guess I've been sitting here thinking about what to say. What he said made me think of something, more empathy more respect for life in general, and that kind of keyed in and I don't know when that started because I find myself picking up earth worms and putting them over in the grass, stepping around the bug, and I never used to do that. I think it's since I've had the dogs, but I had never made that connection before. And maybe that's partly what it is, or getting older, I don't know. I think having the dogs had something to do with it."

David widened the context of companion animal loss to the more general effect of accumulated losses over time that are connected to his personal experiences of loss beyond companion animal loss.

> "Well, I think for me as you said, we're all partly shaped by our experiences, we carry this baggage with us for good or ill, for all of our lives, they either make us better people or not quite so good. That's certainly the experiences of loss I think, as they have for you, encouraged me to be even a bit, or maybe a lot, more concerned more reverent of life, more respectful for life, I also pick up earth worms and if they stay they're dead so if they're in the yard at least you got a chance. Um, but anyway, those experiences either help shape our lives, color how we react not only with the animals in our lives, but I think also with the people in our lives along with all the other organisms like the earth worms. So yeah, it's part of who I am, part of my development as a person has been shaped by those losses. I hope for the better. It's part of who I am as a person, how I react to everybody has in part been influenced by those losses."

One of the most poignant comments that came out of this entire study came from Norm. If there is anything that speaks to the effect of the human-animal bond on a person's life it is the effect Norm speaks of here,

> "Too though as you look at, if you look at the animal relationship, we've all had things like that, thinking I could have done more for this animal, I could have been a better dad to this dog, at the time you know, but again, that makes me think perhaps I should go talk to my son. Perhaps I need to tell him, hey, I'm sorry I disciplined you this way. I was wrong about this 30 years ago and make your peace and say, the animal I may have let that get by, but it taught me a lesson I want to make sure I don't do that with my spouse, my closest friend, son or daughter, whatever it may be. Which is where the animals serve us very well, in the past we don't even know in our own psyche, so it does make you a better person I think."

Vernon has a very hopeful outlook on the experience of grief and loss. This surprised me in a way, but added a different, yet valuable perspective to the panel groups' thought process.

> "I don't know, you get past the grief, and that varies in how long that is going to take, but what stays is all of the fun things, all of the things you did together, in the same sense as immortality. When you pass people, every individual that remembers you gives you immortality. Every animal that I've had that has passed away, I got past the grief, all the memories of, playing and activities and little quirks and the things we did together, those are still there, and uh, so you know from that standpoint there's a great deal of pleasure that comes from, even though you had grief when you lost them, you have pleasure from the time you had together. All the things that we did together it seems like those are more in front. The brain is like a filing cabinet and the older you get, the more full that cabinet gets. I can't remember everything quite like I used to, that's because that filing cabinet is getting full, it's not because you're losing your mind or anything, you've simply got so much information…. All these memories, just fond memories, you've got to grieve, you can't lose someone close to you and not grieve, but then all this good stuff stays. I don't know what life would have been like without all these little furry people in my life."

Norm explains how losing his companion animals has taught him how to grieve for others and to appreciate his life with the animals that are present with him.

> "It's given me a greater appreciation for life, the cost of life, the downside of losing our parents or whatever it may be. I have grieved over one dog as much or more so than I did either one of my parents. I'm one of those people who has to be distracted for the grieving process and the favorite saying amongst my children was being self-employed was you go bury your mother and you go back and make sure the place was closed up at 5 o'clock. And that's true, now I could have arranged to not have done that, but I

> realized that was my way of grieving. I didn't grieve for my mom until about 10 years after she had passed. The animals have taught me how to do that better as time has gone on. But, I think the animals have taught me death is a natural part of life. I think the animal showed me how to do that, we've had a lot of wildlife we lost, they were really little and didn't make it, so even if you had to put the animals down, you don't ever get used to it, it's not fun to watch a squirrel die, you get to the point where you euthanize them, buried everyone, had a little funeral, I don't know, I just can't imagine life without animals."

He went on to comment on what Vernon had said about remembering the good times after loss,

> "You [Vernon] were talking about the memories, we'll sit around and talk about things your family did, and the dogs always come into it too, they all have different stories, and you forget about the time they pee'd on the couch, threw up in the bed. You remember the good things. It's like people too. Not so much the bad things."

Effect of Old Age on Views of Loss

One outcome of loss is that, looking back, the men can see how their perspectives of loss have changed as they have become older. Views on how being older has affected their perspectives on loss were discussed in the panel discussions. I asked the six men of the panel how aging has changed their perspectives of loss. A lively discussion ensued,

Norm is 72 years old, he has lost many dogs over his life span. He was the first to comment,

> "When you're in your 20s or 30s, I don't think they have an appreciation for the finality of death. Well maybe I'll die 50 years from now. Well the older you get the more you realize that that time is closer for you and the pets and everything, so you either become more accepting of it or you realize at least with me it's a natural process of living for the animals."

Vernon, also 72, was sitting to the left of Norm and spoke of cumulative loss,

> "I think the pain level, as you get older, go through the dogs, the pain level is maybe a little less, there's always pain and loss, you've lost a friend, it's tempered a little bit because you've gone through it numerous times."

Norm responded to Vernon discussing how empathy has affected his views of a suffering animal.

> "As you age you get more empathy for the animal, in the sense that you know what the aging process is yourself now, so you know what's going on with them. So you're a little more, at least I am a little more understanding of I don't want to let the animal go, but if that were me, I'd hate to be suffering like that and my situation is different."

David commented,

> "I think, everybody knows that nobody gets out of this alive. I think even as a young person I was aware of the notion of mortality and you're all going to die. Everything that is born is going to die. As an older person now, this seems much more immediate and closer. Perhaps I'm a little more, maybe not sensitive, but aware of the end being more of my thought process now a lot more now than it was when I was 20."

To which Norm responded,

> "That's the point, when you're younger, take the seven to one-year thing (referring to how one year of a human's life is equivalent to seven of a dog's), you're still in your 20s and 30s but the dog is aging much more quickly than you are. You just see he's getting older and gray. But now, it's like we are almost on equal footing you know. It's maybe seven to one, but you have more empathy, you can understand what is going on with the dog too. **Maybe they balance your mortality**." [my bold]

David elaborates,

> "Right, yeah, I can see it in terms of physical performance, even mental performance as far as that goes, but certainly my abilities are on the decline, and maybe as a younger person when I had a dog, yeah, they're going to die, but you know everybody does, but now I think since I'm more aware of my own mortality I'm more aware of Woofy's mortality. And, uh, in some more ways it makes me appreciate the things we share now more than I would have done perhaps as a 20-year old. And I'm aware that this is an event that has a shelf life and it's going to be gone so appreciate it now or miss the opportunity."

He goes on to speak of the empathy Norm mentioned, but also of accumulating losses that Vernon spoke of.

> "I still think one can be empathetic, nothing like being older to experience the ravages of age. Being able to think gee if I'm feeling this, then my dog and partner is aging. So maybe I should be a little more sympathetic or empathetic, anticipate some of their needs a little more based on how I'm feeling. When I was 20 I hadn't lost as much. As I have gotten older, friends have been lost, opportunities have been lost, all kinds of things have been lost, and as I get older and older it seems I'm accumulating more and more of these losses."

One detriment to being an older adult pet owner of an older dog is that losing a dog may also just add to the many losses that can accompany old age. Regardless, the older age of and loss of their dog(s) emphasizes their own age and brings to the fore the reality of their own future demise.

The thoughts and stories that came out of the individual interviews and the subsequent panel sessions emphasize some difficulties of being a companion animal owner. Here, the men have offered personal stories of loss and for Jack and arguably James, a vivid representation of the pain and grief they are presently living with as a result of losing their dog(s). This chapter has highlighted how each one of them is affected by their experiences of loss and how differently they manifest their grief. This can be seen by the manner in which the loss affects their relationship dynamics with subsequent companion animal dog(s). That the men have been changed as a result of a dog's presence and loss is confirmed by their reflections shared here. Each man has made personal meaning of the losses he has experienced.

Chapters five through seven have described elements of attachment and the domains within those elements. The elements are activities, ways of thinking and loss dynamics. The next chapter focuses on attachment from the perspectives of the men, in terms of what attachment means to them and how that attachment has developed into an emotional bond.

Chapter Eight: Attachment and Emotional Bonding

This chapter builds on the discussion of the constructs of attachment and the emotional bond that were introduced early on in the dissertation. Often when the word "attachment" is used in the context of human-animal relationships, the word intends that an emotional bond exists between a companion animal and the one who cares for that animal. I do not feel this is always the case, and as previously stated, I believe attachment precedes the development of the bond but remains throughout the duration of the relationship as long as it is maintained by the existence of the elements that develop that attachment. The previous three chapters explained how, for these men, the combined elements of attachment work toward the development of that emotional bond.

Not being fully satisfied with how Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) is utilized in the research to explain the complicated nature of the human-animal bond, I set out to discover exactly how attachment to companion animals is manifest and developed by the men and what attachment means to them. The elements of the previous three chapters interact to work toward the men's development of an emotional bond toward their dog(s). In this chapter the men tell me what attachment and developing an emotional bond to their dog(s) means to them.

The Meaning of Attachment

The following discussion emerged from the individual interviews.

When asked what "attachment" means to Norm he explained,

> "It's like being a father to your children, or a good husband. The other person or animal brings out the best of me. If that makes sense. It can make me realize that I've got to do whatever I need to do above my feelings, more than I would do, for the dog. It's the same mindset."

Just as I asked Norm, I asked Vernon what attachment meant to him in terms of Zeus. He said, and I repeat a quote from chapter six,

> "It's a family member. It's the same attachment a father would have for a son or a child. It's like having a son. He's with me, he's my companion."

He goes on to explain how he is attached to Cozette and Amelia, but more so to Zeus,

> "Anybody who knows us, knows how attached we are to each other. **The only difference here is he and I are bonded."** [my bold]
>
> David spoke of Woofy as a family member and described his relationship to her,
>
> "Well, it's attachment. I don't know what the alternative would be beyond attachment. She's really important, beyond that I don't know how to describe it. She's just very important to me."

Vernon's point, "The only difference here is he and I are bonded" speaks to my argument that one can be attached to an animal, but the bond is of a different nature. His bond with Zeus goes beyond attachment, to that next level of complexity and depth where I claim lies the difference in the impact the bond has on the men.

The Emotional Bond

The emotional bond is the outcome of the attachment that the men have established with their dog, defined as a feeling-based connection toward the dog that evokes a physiological response from the men. An example of a physiological response was demonstrated by David when he began to cry profusely in our individual interview while discussing his connection to Woofy. There are many manifestations of the emotional bond that serve to influence it, but the one that was most pronounced was the men's emotional reactions to loss such as feeling bereft as a result of such separation. For James the emotional bond is "unmeasurable." James' experience of losing Biscuit

when he was 11 years old still affects him today. I use James' quote from the third panel discussion here,

> "She (Biscuit) had tried to follow us [crying] and there she was on the side of the road. I can still see her lying here. Never forget it and I'll never get over it. Whenever we lose one I go right back to that. I didn't have a dog again for about 20 years. I was 11 at the time. Actually, it was longer than that, 25 years. I just couldn't stand the thought of ever losing one and I still can't stand it [crying]."

Carter's expressions of grief over losing his dogs manifest themselves in anger and tears. He explained that he "cried like a baby" after losing a golden retriever he had as an adult and was "angry with myself" for not keeping a better eye on Derby as he jumped a fence and was killed by a car. When I asked James, what attachment to his three dogs, Lucy, Stella and Minnie, means to him, he said,

> "The emotional attachment will be something that is really hard to measure. Yes, companion animals do some things similar to things that humans do, and approve of you or disapprove of you, all of that plays into the emotional attachment and in a sense mimicking to the extant the animal mimics those characteristics, they contribute to your feeling of attachment. If your companion animal shows emotion, I think that contributes."

Norm speaks of commitment when he was asked to explain his bond with Lexi,

> "It takes commitment, but I think that's one of the things where you get a psychological thing…but if you really love your animal, well the commitment is I've got to take care of this dog as long as it lives, unless something drastic happens, but I wouldn't think about giving away one of my dogs just as I wouldn't my son."

Warren was one of the most emotionally expressive men I interviewed. He could not attend the panel discussions. He described what happened to him when his wife brought Peaches home that first day,

> "I just, I guess it just clicked you know. I guess it just…..like I said I had dogs before, but I did not have a feeling toward a dog I had before, and for some reason, with this one… but uh, she's been something though. I never would have thought…never…."

In this section I have summarized the meaning of attachment and offered a few perspectives of the deeper level that develops from attachment—the emotional bond. All of the elemental manifestations of attachment mentioned in chapters five through seven: activities, ways of thinking and; emotional reactions to loss, culminate in the development of an emotional bond toward their dog(s). So far, the men and their dogs have been introduced, the context in which the relationship is situated has been described, the elemental manifestations of attachment to their dog(s), and the outcome of the development of attachment which is the emotional bond have all been discussed. The next chapter will put all of these men and their dogs in context and discuss how contextual effects influence change in attachment and the bond over the life span of the men.

Chapter Nine: Effects of Life Course on the Relationship

Studies of the life course and life cycle should consider the role that companion animals play in their owners' lives as companion animals are often viewed as a member of the family and can experience the many changes their family experiences as they age along with them (Turner, 2006). Certain events that take place in life such as divorce, death, relocation and children leaving the home may generate a need for social and emotional support from either a human or animal companion (Sable, 1995). The role of the companion animal will often change depending on the changing needs of the family during a particular life stage. For instance, a companion animal may be a companion to young unmarried adults with no children who have just left the nest and who may develop strong attachment to their companion animal as a replacement for absent family (Schvaneveldt, 2001; Turner, 2006). In addition, one-fourth of newly married couples adopt a companion animal in order to "practice" for rearing children (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). The companion animal often becomes a surrogate "baby" for the young couple. Even as young couples are delaying having human babies, they do not delay adopting a companion animal (Turner, 2006). There is evidence that young couples with children actually become less attached to their companion animal as the demands of being a new parent detract from time available to spend with the companion animal (Shir-Vertesh, 2012; Turner, 2006).

During later life, companion animals can be especially important. The presence of a companion animal in an older person's life can contribute to their mental and physical quality of life. Older adults who have a companion animal at home are less likely to see their doctor and report fewer psychologically distressing events (Siegel, 1990). Older

adults who had lost a spouse to death scored high on levels of attachment, and therefore bonding, to their companion animal (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Older adults experience a multitude of transitions and losses as they age. For instance, they may lose their home and have to move into a long-term care facility. Not only does this lead to displacement but also a feeling of losing independence, sense of agency and freedom of mobility and choice. Having a companion animal present may provide stability and comfort (Sharkin & Bahrick, 1990), consistency and a source of companionship during such a time of stress (Siegel, 1990) due to the shared bond that is carried over that can provide a buffer to the worse elements of relocation stress. Another area of loss, especially for men, may be the life transition of retiring with the severance of relationships that may have spanned a career.

With the rising number of baby boomers looking ahead to retirement, much emphasis has surrounded this life-changing transition. For men especially, retirement can be connected to loss of identity and purpose in later life (Norris, Shinew, Chick, & Beck, 1999). Maintaining higher levels of quality of life in old age is also an area of recent research focus (Bowling, Banister, Sutton, Evans, & Windsor, 2002; Bowling & Gabriel, 2007). But loss of identity and purpose in later life for older men is not inevitable. Perhaps caring for a companion animal dog can be a way to instill a sense of purpose, meaning and self-worth in this stage of life, or reduce the stress that can accompany retirement (Suthers-McCabe, 2001). There is much work to be done focusing solely on the effects of companion animals in the lives of retired men. How caring for a dog affects men's mental, physical, social and even spiritual health remain under-researched. Caring for a dog could be a mechanism with which to maintain quality of life in old age.

The strength of the attachment toward and ability to develop a bond with a companion animal may be best explained utilizing a life course perspective. The many events and transitions an older adult has experienced through their life span, and the environment in which they experience these events, may cumulatively contribute to their attachments and bonds with a companion animal. Older adults who are divorced, never-married, widowed and who have no children living nearby report feeling closer to their companion animal (Parslow et al., 2005). Looking at the relationship between men and their dogs through the lens of a life course perspective may reveal the life events and personal circumstances that explain this relationship with a current companion animal that can either reduce or intensify and reinforce the development of a bond with the animal.

Role of Dogs over the Life Span

Norm and James eloquently discuss how the role of dogs has changed for them over their life span as an effect of their life course with great focus on their present life stage. I begin with their quotes and follow with more detailed descriptions of how their relationships with dogs changed over their life spans and helps to explain how they situate evolving relationships within their current life stage.

James speaks of how his relationship with his dogs has evolved over his life span, speaking of the deeper meaning of the current relationship for him in his old age,

> "Oh yeah, I think you don't quite understand it all when you are a kid. It's more emotional, other than analyzing. When you are a kid, you feel for a companion animal, it grows as you live and as you grow older, I think it's deeper and I think it's also a result of experiencing love in your life with human contact that helps you to understand what those commitments really are. It's deeper, um, but you know, we talked about the factors you have to do, sustenance and such, and love, when you are a kid you don't think about the sustenance, dad and mom feed it, buy the food, so you get the fun part.

> The love. If the dog poops, uh, probably if you are very young, you don't have to clean it up, but as you get older you may have to. You learn to live with it. That's part of maturity. I don't think any kid likes to clean up anything else for that matter. But yeah, I think it gets deeper as you get more mature."

Norm said something similar while focusing on different life stages.

> "Well I think you'll find dogs, as we age in our different stages of life, dogs are different thing to us. At one point, the dogs were very important to our children. They were still important to us, but they would actually more migrate toward the children and the children to them, they were good friends for the boys really. And um, as we get older it's something to focus on, keep you busy, keep you interested, you gotta get up in the morning and feed the dog. It keeps you in the mode of taking care of something. They have played different roles throughout our lives. When we were young, we got our first dog, it was like he was our first child, I mean he had clothes and we dressed him up. So, it's like, whatever age you are, and then you get into your 40's and then you really, your career, and you're so busy and you got children, and they're just an aggravation. So, you're like, why do I have a dog? But then the kids attach to the dog, or that they have the need, but I do think they do fill different roles, and I never thought of it that way until just we got to talking about it. But I think, because these two dogs, we have had since we've been retired, since these dogs know nothing else, and not around kids, and we're there all the time."

Delineating the experiences of the men's relationships with their dogs through a life course perspective provides a clear picture of how early life stage relationships with their dogs affects their later life stage relationships and emotional bonds they form with their dogs.

Childhood Companion Animals

All of these men, with the exception of Carter had a dog as a child. The dogs the men interacted with as children were generally considered a "family dog." The family dogs of their youths were an essential part of their family's way of life and the memory of these dogs later influenced each man's connection to their current dog(s). As James

said, “it is in later life that you fully appreciate the deeper relationship a person can have with their dog that you may not have appreciated in your younger years.”

Guard Dog/Family Dog

It is very common for families in Kentucky to keep an outdoor dog to guard the farm animals and property. These dogs are not house companion animals and are viewed quite differently from the companion animal dogs the men have today. Vernon’s memories from his childhood were that dogs were kept on a chain or ran free outdoors. They had a doghouse in which to sleep, and only rarely came into the house during winter.

Norm clearly remembers dogs that were living on the tobacco farms where he lived in eastern Kentucky; the purpose of the dog was to keep watch over the chickens and to alert his family to an intruder.

> “I was raised in a rural area, tobacco farming people from Kentucky. Like I say, when I was a kid, you kept a farm dog around or two, they lived outside. he might get in the house in the wintertime, but for the most part they live outside to keep an eye on the chickens, if anything went on you knew…like a big old burly dog. We had a St. Bernard mix you would know you didn’t come around here. He’d bark and bark. There’s nothing bigger on the food chain around here than me.”

Ray was intrigued by a German Shepherd he had while growing up in rural Kentucky living on a farm with his grandmother.

> “When I was real small we had a German Shepherd one time, he was a different individual, anything you told him to get he’d go get it or kill it, whichever one you told him to do, didn’t matter if it was an animal, if it didn’t leave, he’d run it off. If you wanted him to get the cows he’d get the cows, if you needed him to get the pigs, he’d get the pigs in, he actually learned that on his own. My grandmother, I lived with her at the time, and we had a fence, well he learned that my grandmother didn’t want the chickens on the yard side of the fence, so he took it on himself to, they stayed on that side of the fence, but, the bad thing was, if they didn’t make

> it to the fence before he got to them, then they weren't a chicken anymore. He would kill 'em. If they made it to the fence, he'd stop."

Warren's family had a dog on the farm where he was raised.

> "I guess growing up (in a rural area) in that period of time it seemed like there were just more dogs around than any other animal for that matter. So, the dog was I guess, my grandparents had dogs, and very seldom to be honest, I don't remember any of the family having cats. We were a close knit at that time, close knit family and we all lived close together, they had their own animals, but dogs were what everyone had."

These men suggest through their stories that emerged in the individual interviews the purpose of a dog when they were a child that of being a guard dog, along with not sharing a living environment, worked to keep these animals on the periphery of their emotional engagement. For those that were able to form an emotional bond with their family dogs, the dog was often seen as a childhood friend. For Ray, the function of the dog made a difference in terms of interaction, as the German Shepherd he mentions here was a guard dog, but below you will see he considered a Spitz a friend.

Friend

David had a few dogs in his childhood, but one he especially remembers was named Tar. She died when he was seven or eight. When asked what made her special he replied,

> "Oh, the time in my life yeah, I thought of her as my best friend. We lived in the city. I have two siblings, an older brother and a younger brother who is a year younger. The older brother was six years [older] … so we weren't close. I was closer with my younger brother, a built-in playmate for me. I had the dog too."

Even as a young boy who had siblings to share his time with, David considered his dog a playmate and a friend.

Ray was close to a family dog, one he turned to when his family was going through a difficult time.

> "Dogs have always been…I remember, I can remember when I was a child, mom and dad divorced, and when things happened that I didn't understand and I'd go out and sit and cry and talk to that Spitz, and it wasn't even mine, it was my sister's, but I remember going out and talking to the dog at that age when I was a child, so you know, you can say things to a dog and you're not going to be judged by it and people won't laugh at you in any way. You know, maybe it's an escape that you may think you can't have with a human being."

Norm and Ray's childhood dogs were guard dogs on their family's farm, while David's childhood dog was a friend. Ray's friendship with the Spitz he had manifest in very personal ways that evoke feelings of trust and vulnerability. Chip, very briefly mentioned an interaction he had with a dog as an adolescent.

> "Got another dog when I was 14 or so, just a companion. She liked to play ball and sit on top of the newspaper when I spread it out on the floor to read."

Scott's parents surprised him and his brother when they were very young by acquiring a puppy they named Shrimpy.

> "My brother was 11 and I was 10 when we got this dog, and that's the only dog we had during my youth. But he just became a fixture in the house, a family member. We walked it every night, interacted with it, uh, ate with it, we got to know his personality, he knew ours. I liked the dog a lot, a lot of the time I was the one that walked it, when I got my own bedroom the dog always slept down there, by the time I was in late high school and college, guess I had a roommate, but Shrimpy would say he got a roommate. Ha ha, so you know, uh, I spent a lot of time with the dog. We just let him have free range of the house, so you'd be sitting down and plunk, there's the dog, and you plunk, there he'd be, we'd all be watching TV, Shrimpy would come in, pick out where he wanted to sit, you know….I had no idea, we'd come in and there was something scratching at the garage and mom says, "Open it." and there's this little dog, total surprise."

This section has described how the role of companion animal dogs changed throughout the childhoods of the participants, evolving from guard dog to friend or

playmate. Some of these changing roles of the dogs in their childhood were influenced by their parents' needs for a dog, such as needing a guard dog for the family farm, but some changing roles of the dog were directed at the child, such as the need to develop a friendship with the dog or have the dog as a trustworthy companion.

Adulthood Companion Animals

Influence of Wives

Six of the men got a dog at their wife's behest. None claimed to regret it, in fact, they often formed an intensely emotional bond with the dog. Norm was perfectly content with Lexi, his part Pyrenees part St. Bernard mix but his wife insisted she wanted a purebred St. Bernard so they obtained Bear from a breeder. Norm is more attached to Lexi and claims she is the first dog he has ever had that was "My dog."

> "I told her if you want another one we need to get a quality dog from a good breeder. So, they may not have these kinds of problems, at least not early on. Anyway, we're both rescue, humane society people so we really wrestled with that, but, she really wanted a Saint, and Lexi is a rescue and she ended up being my dog. I was perfectly happy with Lexi, but Linda wanted a St. Bernard. Lexi wasn't a purebred St. Bernard. She was close, but not the whole thing. She had to have her St. Bernard. So, I said, Ok, we'll get a St. Bernard, but we're stopping at two. So, we stopped at two. That's when we got Bear."

Warren had not had a dog since childhood until his wife, Ruth, brought Peaches home from a shelter for a few days to foster her. Neither predicted Warren would warm up to her, let alone want to keep her. When asked what changed his mind about wanting a dog he replied,

> "Like I said, the date we took her up, it wasn't 30 minutes, I said, oh no. I don't know…I guess it just clicked you know. Like I said, I had dogs before, but did not have a feeling toward a dog, and for some reason with this one…I don't know…maybe just the way she looked at you...I guess it was just the way she looked at you, and the way she looks at you now. Boy she

> can stare right at you, and uh, so I mean (begins to become quite emotional) I just hate when I have to give her up."

Vernon was unaware of his wife's plans to get him Zeus, his Yorkie. Mary acquired Zeus with the intention of him being Vernon's dog. She intentionally did not interact with Zeus so he would become attached to Vernon over her.

> "She got him for me, I didn't know she was going to do that. It was a total surprise. The other dogs are Mary's dogs, there's a little bit of a connection between me and her dogs, but they are Mary's dogs. As opposed to Zeus, he's always close to daddy. He's my dog."

John and his wife had two dogs and he was very content with that number. His wife however had come across a picture of a dog that had been neglected and sent the picture via email to John. At first, John refused to respond to the picture attached to the email from his wife. He eventually did and brought a third dog, Ruby, into their home.

> "Well, in late January I got this email from my wife with this dog and she just looked awful. She was in the kennel and it was a hoarder situation. She had every parasite known to man; heartworms, her brother died from heartworms, and my wife sees this picture and it said she was a pointer mix. I didn't answer the email of Ruby because we already had two Corgis. We didn't need a third dog and it was the ugliest dog you ever saw. Awful looking. She sends me another email and a third email. I was like, we don't need another dog. Well, we went out and looked at her and brought her home. We became like that in two days. Ruby and I. So, Ruby was my dog."

Carter had two dogs at the time he and his wife adopted Atlas, their beagle. Atlas had been found with is leg caught in a snare out in the woods. He was taken to the vet and received care and later had his picture put up online so he could be adopted. Carter's wife, Rosa, saw the picture and encouraged him to go see Atlas.

> "My wife immediately wanted him, so we got him. But he was terrified of me and all men. If he wants something to eat or if I'm playing with her [his golden retriever, Freyja] … but if I'm standing he won't come near me. Somebody abused him you know. He's learning to be more sociable."

Norm, John and Vernon both use the phrasing “my dog” to refer to the dogs to which they are very connected. I believe the men’s use of the phrase “my dog” does not mean to imply simply a possessive ownership of the dog, but a much deeper, personal relationship steeped in pride. As a result, these dogs have become a primary component of their identity as companion animal owners, which in turn, provides them with meaning in their later years.

In many cases, the men’s wives influenced them to obtain a dog. This dynamic of influence from the wives affects the human-animal bond between the men and the dogs in that Atlas is afraid of Carter and while Norm cares deeply for Bear, he is Anne’s dog, not “his dog.” These quotes were obtained from the individual interviews. It would be a dynamic topic of discussion in a future panel discussion. Children influence the dynamics of the human-animal relationship. All of the men except for Chip and David have children. Below are details of how becoming a father affected the participants’ relationships with their dog(s).

Presence of Children

The presence of a new child in the home can influence someone to give up their dog, as was the case with Carter. He was forced to give up his dog upon his wife having a baby due to the dog’s possessive nature which resulted in a safety concern for his child. Carter relayed to me a story of having to give up this dog.

> “The little one (Sammy) was always competing for food, water, attention, whatever…anything the big dog had, him being the runt, he felt like I better get this, had a great personality, but was very needy. So, when the first baby came along, we said Sammy is going to have to find a new family, we had to relocate him.”

A combination of divorce and an act of selflessness forced Jack to give his dog, Bud, to his ex-wife as his three daughters lived with her and he did not want to separate the girls from Bud because of their relationship with him.

> "I lived in Lawrenceburg, I had a big ol' yellow lab out there. He was a hell of a dog. Moved into town and the dog stayed in Lawrenceburg. My ex-wife kept him. And the three girls, they grew up with him, they were itty bitty things and we got him as a pup and the youngest daughter was just born when we got him. He was their brother. He was a big ol' boy and he took care of them out there. He just was a cute little yellow lab pup, and he grew up to be a watch dog and made sure, we lived out in the country, on a rural road, and he made sure no one came into the yard when they were out there playing, no one came in our yard. And then they moved and left him with some neighbors there, and he got hit by a car out there. I feel really bad about that. We discussed, we should have brought him here, we didn't have at that time, a place to keep him. Like I said, he was a country dog, he couldn't have done a house and been penned in."

Jack's selfless act did not end well for Bud or for his girls and this experience; although this occurred over 20 years ago, it is still quite vivid in his mind.

Larry, when asked why he brought home his dog that died two years ago, spoke of the desire to instill a sense of responsibility in his son through caring for a puppy,

> "I think I thought it would be good for him (his son) to have one. Learn some responsibility of taking care of a pup. They need that to some extent, but the parents do most of it."

Scott mentions similar reasons for getting a dog for his three sons. He speaks of not only assistance with caring for the dog from his sons, but of their interaction with the dogs and some possible lessons in care as a result.

> "We decided that a dog would be nice for the boys particularly, our older son wanted a dog. I missed having a dog, I was always the dog person. The dog is always glad to see you, and always forgives you, and loves you about as close to unconditional love you will find from another being. So, we got Manny in 2002, she was a puppy from the pound, a mutt, part golden retriever and shepherd, she was a big fuzzy 50-pound ball of dog. The kids were old enough to uh, help out with the chore of having the dog, know how to interact with the dog, not abuse the dog, not bother it."

Norm adopted a dog many years ago when his son was young and was struggling with some emotional concerns of his own.

> "They would actually more migrate toward the children and the children to them, they were good friends for the boys really. Especially the one boy. If he got mad or had a problem, he'd go tell the dog everything. What a great psychologist-the dog was."

As parents themselves, Larry, Scott and Norm mentioned getting a dog specifically for their children. Some dogs were obtained with the purpose of providing children with an opportunity and the means of learning responsibility as well as to be companions and playmates.

Older Adulthood Companion Animals

Retirement

Seven of the 12 men in this study, Warren, Norm, Vernon, James, Larry, Ray and David, are retired. They shared how this life stage is richer as a result of keeping dog(s) for a companion animal. These men have been retired from full-time work, either voluntarily or involuntarily as a result of health concerns or disability or to their employer changing their retirement benefits to where staying employed would be detrimental to their financial security. For instance, Vernon cited the manner in which his employer was changing his retirement benefits which would have forced him to work five years longer than he had planned in order to make up the financial difference that those changes would have created. As a result, although he did not want to retire, he felt forced to do so. Larry was also forced to retire because of a cancer diagnosis and was asked to leave work, but it was also made clear by his employer that should an improvement in his health ever allow him to return to work he would be permitted to do so, though not in the same position that he held as that position might not be available upon his return. Ray was forced to

retire as a result of a spinal cord injury that happened on the job. Warren, Norm, James and David all retired voluntarily. At the time of retirement, Warren had Peaches, David had Woofy, Vernon had Zeus, and James had Lucy and Stella. Norm did not have either Lexi or Bear, Larry did not have Charlie as she had died, and Ray did not have Gypsy. The other five participants are currently working full-time.

There is a direct, positive relationship between time spent with dogs as a result of being retired, and the effects of that time on the dynamic of the relationship. During the middle years of life, one's time is consumed by the reality of priorities and responsibilities related to raising children and employment. Retirement brings with it many changes, but one that is mentioned by these participants is a new freedom from responsibility and having the option of where to focus one's time, which, it turns out, is mostly directed toward their dog. John wrote an endearing letter to his deceased dog and asked her to forgive him for not spending as much time with her when he was employed full-time as he felt he should have. He is not retired, but considers himself to be "semi-retired" and values the time his new more flexible job has allowed him to spend with his current dogs

No participant mentioned retiring in order to spend more time with his dog(s), but some did mention being able to spend more time with their dog(s) as an added benefit of retirement. Norm mentioned in our individual interview how he gives himself more freedom to take the time to enjoy watching Lexi and Bear.

> "Now that we are retired, even though we stay busy, take a half hour and sit there and watch the dogs if they are doing something interesting. So, I may sit on the front porch for half an hour and watch the dog. It's interesting to me as I've got somewhat of a curious mind. Yes, it's nice to have the time. Not only do you have the time to watch the dog if you want to, and not have

> to do other things, you don't have to be somewhere at the same time every morning."

David also mentioned to me individually how the dynamic of his relationship with his dog has not changed with respect to how they spend their time, but just the fact that he has more of it.

> "I've had more time to be with her since retirement, and that has changed our dynamic slightly, in general, the kind of time we spend together hasn't changed, but there is more of it."

He goes on to explain how time has influenced that dynamic specifically concerning how the walks with Woofy have changed as a result of retirement.

> "When she was younger, and I was younger, our walks were pretty much the human would determine the scope of the walk and the duration and direction, but since retirement it's the dog and I let her determine where she wants to go within reason, so some days she feels like she wants to walk reasonably far so we walk far, and some days it's a couple of hundred yards and that's fine too."

Even obligations of leisure change as a result of having more time, perhaps as a result of the freedom to focus on something other than one's career.

Warren is an example of the opposite of what David experienced. He worked and lived during the week in eastern Kentucky and traveled to his permanent home in Lexington, where his wife and Peaches were, on the weekends. His work schedule did not allow for him to spend as much quality time with Peaches before, whereas now, with retirement, he is able to do so.

> "I get to see her every day. It used to be twice a week so, you know, but it makes things closer between she and I. But since I've been here every day, I think we've gotten stronger together. Just time."

Vernon's dog, Zeus, follows him around everywhere he goes and is consistently by his side as his companion. Vernon spoke to me individually of a possible benefit of retirement related to having dogs, never being alone.

> "Well, now (after retirement) they just hang with me. He wears himself out. Anywhere I go, he's there. He will be with me. I'm never alone."

James, an exuberant man, is very pleased with retirement and the time he gets to spend with his three dogs. He says the following with a huge smile on his face and a laugh.

> "We're with them twenty-four/seven. Especially now that I'm retired. It's wonderful. Having the pets there makes it (retirement) so much better."

David mentions that taking care of Woofy's needs pre-retirement was an obligation, and post-retirement he sees it as a joy.

> "I think again, post retirement, she assumed a more, she was always important, we adjusted our schedules to meet her needs, we always were serious about taking good care of her, were responsive to her medical demands, although they were not great, we were sincere and committed to being good dog owners, we took our responsibility of having a companion animal very seriously…I spend more time with her and it's more important now. I think the purpose is a big player and an important thing. I guess in some ways because I get to spend more time with her, I get to enjoy that time with her more. In some other instances, before retirement, we spent time with her but it was more meeting the obligation of doing what I had to do in order to make sure her life was OK, coming home at lunch, letting her out, was again important to me, important enough for me to do that. She probably would have gotten along just fine, I convinced myself I was doing something in her best interest but there was always the obligation to get home at lunch to do that and get back to work in time, so it was fitting her into the day as opposed to having the time to do something with her when it wasn't something that was just fit in when it was the reason for the day. So, there's more of that now than there was when I was working, so again, the time we spend together is a less um, I'm responding to my responsibility, which is what I was doing before, whereas now, I'm enjoying the experience."

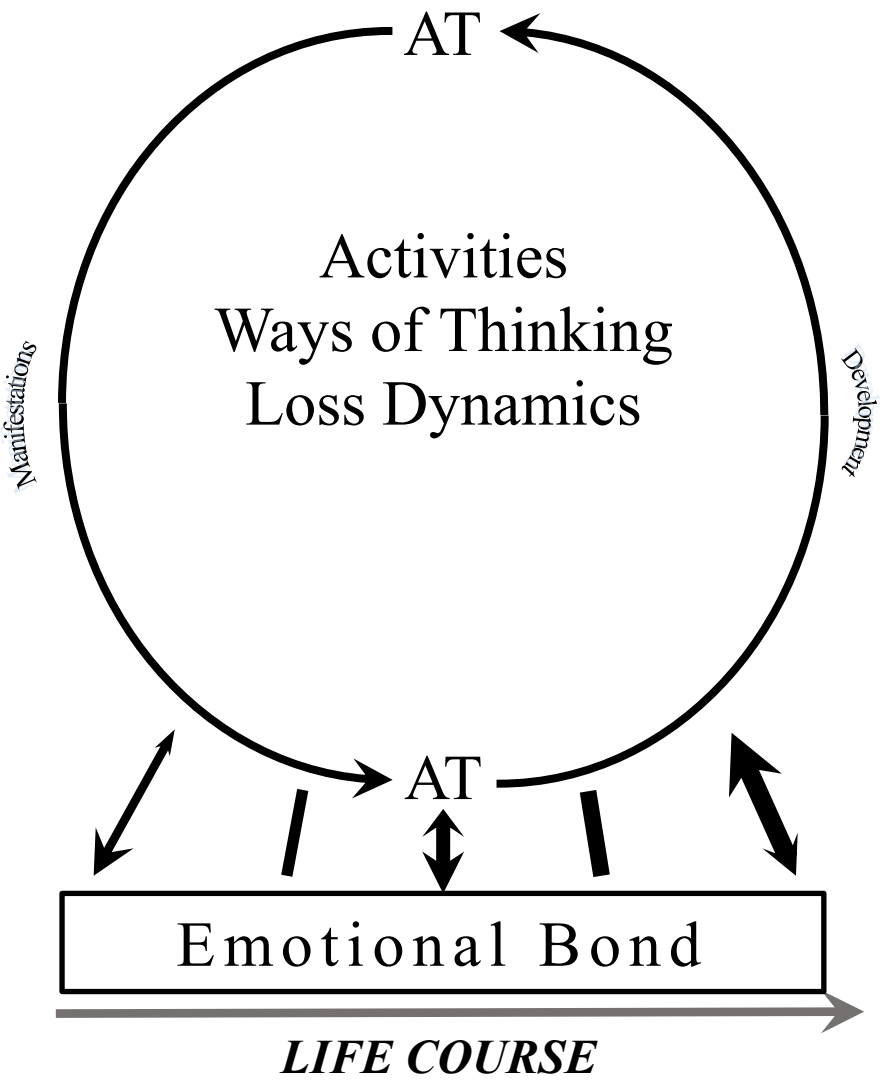
David's ruminations on how retirement has affected both the time spent with Woofy and his responsibility for her care clearly elucidate the effects of available time to these men

and how they feel about the interaction of time as a result of retirement and the effect of time on their relationships with their dog(s). To these men, being retired has offered the time to enrich the dynamic between themselves and their dog(s) that may have been there before retirement but was not able to be fully realized as it is now that they are retired. Norm is enjoying the moments he spends with Lexi just being curious about her behavior; Scott seems to love his dogs' presence; and David's life is full of enjoyable responsibility.

This section has illustrated how these men's relationships with their dog(s)w evolved throughout their life span as a direct consequence of their life course. Dogs that once were fun playmates and even friends in childhood were replaced by other dog(s) in adulthood, often as a result of these men's wives influence to obtain a dog. For those men who had a child(ren), they affected the present relationship sometimes with the consequence of having to give up the dog, other times with the consequence of their child(ren) learning responsibility or having a friend. Retirement again, changed the relationship, with the dogs now bringing a new sense of enjoyment, responsibility and fun to this life stage that is acknowledged and appreciated. Figure 9.1 is a visual representation of how the elements that are a manifestation of attachment and that also maintain the attachment act as a recursive process that influences the development of attachment into an emotional bond and that is affected by the life course. With sustained and continuing maintenance, these elements, over time, work to deepen the emotional bond toward their companion animal.

The following chapter considers all of the data I gathered from the individual interviews and panel discussions and situates that data within a conceptual model that moves toward a theory of old men and their dogs.

Figure 9.1 Effects of Life Course on Manifestations and Development of Attachment (AT) and the Emotional Bond



Chapter Ten: Toward a Theory of Old Men and Their Dogs

This chapter will explain how the elements of the previous chapters come together to produce a preliminary conceptual model that moves toward a theory of older adult men and their dogs. Section one describes and defines a model that is the essence of the theory. Section two explains the outcome of interaction of those elements; and section three situates this model in a life course context in order to describe the forces that influence change in the model.

The Elements

The model consists of three broad elements: 1) activities; 2) ways of thinking; and 3) loss dynamics. Every element consists of domains that influence the development of the human-animal emotional bond. This model was shown in Figure 9.1.

1) Activities

The first of the three elements is activities, defined as physical interactions the men engage in with their dogs where they are in close proximity to one another. The domains of physical interactions from chapter four are walking, playing and "being with" that culminate in a fourth domain, the development of a routine with the dog(s). Two participants, Chip and David, are used here as examples of the domain of walking. Chip walks his dogs separately so each dog enjoys the experience in a manner that works best for himself and the dogs. David spends more time walking Woofy now that he is retired. Because he no longer has constraints on the time he spends with Woofy he allows her to dictate where and for how long they walk. Norm and Ray provide two examples of the men playing with their dogs. Norm's dog Bear demands at least 30 minutes allotted each day for playtime and Ray and Gypsy play together every evening at seven pm. Scott and

Jack both enjoy the simple pleasure of "being with" their dogs. Scott enjoys having Ginny sit at his feet when he comes home from work, and Jack used to sit in his chair every day and simply pet Winston. Jack misses being able to do this each night with Winston. Each of these men developed routines through engaging in these activities with their dog(s). These routines consume a significant part of each man's day that is spent in quality time with their dog(s).

2) Ways of Thinking

A second element of the model is ways of thinking about the dog(s). Ways of thinking is defined as formulating judgments through reasoning that serves to situate the dog(s) within a meaningful relationship with the men. There are four domains under ways of thinking. The first is viewing their dogs as family members. All of the men consider their dogs to be part of their family. Vernon is an especially fitting example. He often said of Zeus, "…he's my child." Carter speaks with his wife of Atlas and Freyja as though they are their children saying, "It's fun to speak of them that way." The second domain of ways of thinking is recognizing cross-species commonalities/anthropomorphizing. All of the men demonstrated both of these behaviors during their individual interviews and the panel discussions. Warren spoke of Peaches as being scared when he and his wife took her to Pet Suites for a day or an overnight stay. He said she may wonder "are you coming back?" after they dropped her off and this makes Warren emotional thinking she may be scared or insecure. There was a sense of sympathy in Ray's voice when he told me how he thought Gypsy thought he was dead because he had been gone from home during his stint in rehab after his accident. The third domain is the idea of a pack mentality (thinking their dog(s) consider them as part of their pack and

consider the dog(s) as part of theirs). Vernon said, “It’s all about the pack. Zeus and I are a pack. Dogs are pack animals.” Chip claims that dogs prefer a pack structure and he is happy to situate himself as the leader of the pack. “I always have to be the leader of the pack” he said in our individual interview. The fourth and final domain is that of responsibility, a feeling of accountability to create and maintain a high quality of life for their pet. This feeling was eloquently portrayed by David when he said,

> “Our house is strange in many ways, so we divide responsibilities. We adjusted our schedules to meet her needs, we always were serious about taking good care of her, were responsive to her medical demands, although they were not great, we were sincere and committed to being good dog owners, we took our responsibility of having a companion animal very seriously.”

These ways of thinking about their dogs have a significant influence on the development of the emotional bond the men experience with their dog(s).

3) Loss Dynamics

A third element is related to the men’s experiences with and reactions to loss of a dog. Loss is defined in two ways: that of the experience of loss, which is death of a pet dog; and the emotional reaction to that loss, often seen in the expressions of emotion by the men such as James’ crying when discussing loss. There are four domains under loss. The first domain is the experience of loss as told by stories of loss provided by the men. All of the men have lost a dog to death at some point in their lives. Mark lost his dog, Charlie, two years ago and did not want to discuss her with me at all with me. Jack just lost Winston four months before I interviewed him. He teared up when discussing losing Winston. The second domain is the decisions the men had to make regarding euthanizing their dog(s). Carter said regarding his responsibility to end his dog’s suffering, “I think we have that responsibility because these animals can’t communicate with us. They

depend on us for everything." The third domain is the outcomes of the loss. The effect of loss on the bond with subsequent dogs is seen in a few ways. It is manifest in Chip's expressions toward his dogs, "You're making me think, I tell my dogs I love them a lot more than I ever did, I used to say good boy or I love you, I say that a whole lot more now. I think I'd feel guilty if I didn't say that and let them know that." The same theme is also apparent in John's feelings, "Then of course we lost Ruby. There will never be that relationship with me and another dog. I can't imagine it. It wasn't intentional, but I can't imagine it ever even unfolding like that again." Loss also had an effect on men's personal ways of thinking about loss and mortality. Norm commented that "perhaps they balance your own mortality." The final domain is that of how being older men has affected their views of loss. I repeat a quote of Norm's from chapter seven,

> "When you're in your 20s or 30s, I don't think they have an appreciation for the finality of death. Well maybe I'll die 50 years from now. Well the older you get the more you realize that that time is closer for you and the pets and everything, so you either become more accepting of it or you realize at least with me it's a natural process of living for the animals."

Loss has had a profound effect on the men's sense of being older and their own perspectives on mortality. If anything has come from loss of a pet it is perhaps a lasting positive influence on their appreciation for themselves, others and to use David's words, the "finality of life."

"We who choose to surround ourselves
with lives even more temporary than our
own, live within a fragile circle;
easily and often breached.
Unable to accept its awful gaps,
we would still live no other way.
We cherish memory as the only
certain immortality, never fully
understanding the necessary plan."

Irving Townsend

The next section clarifies how all of the elements mentioned above interact to affect the men's appreciation for the role their dog(s) play in their lives.

Interaction of the Elements

All of the aforementioned elements and domains have influenced an appreciation for the role of the dog(s). This appreciation has stimulated the men to consider life and being older adult men in connection to their dog(s) existentially in two ways: through an increased reverence for life; and through the development of a transcendent view of their own aging.

1). *Reverence for Life*

The use of the term "reverence for life" came directly from the men in the panel discussions when we discussed loss of companion animals and the appreciation that comes from that loss as demonstrated by the ways the dog(s) have affected the men. A reverence for the lives of others was mentioned first, followed by comments concerning a reverence for their own lives. James was the first to explain what he meant with respect to reverence for life for others' lives when he said,

> "I think I have more reverence for life than I would otherwise have. Cause once you've felt the love for a companion animal and felt that loss, and you've had it happen repeatedly, I think that does something to you. Um, I don't know if, it makes you have more empathy, but for me I think it certainly has accentuated over my life time a reverence for life."

Chip was silent and lost in thought for a few moments but then commented after James.

> "I guess I've been sitting here thinking about what to say. What he said made me think of something, more empathy more respect for life in general, and that kind of keyed in and I don't know when that started because I find myself picking up earth worms and putting them over in the grass, stepping around the bug, and I never used to do that. I think it's since I've had the dogs, but I had never made that connection before. And maybe that's partly what it is, or getting older, I don't know. I think having the dogs had something to do with it."

Chip made a direct association between his tendency to save earthworms and his caring for his two dogs, Teddy and Lucky. This was the first time he had made that connection. David commented,

> "I also pick up earth worms and if they stay they're dead so if they're in the yard at least you got a chance. Um, but anyway, those experiences either help shape our lives, color how we react not only with the animals in our lives, but I think also with the people in our lives along with all the other organisms like the earth worms."

A reverence for their own lives was seen by comments made by David such as, "We all know nobody gets out of this alive. This is an event that has a shelf life and it's going to be gone so appreciate it now or miss the opportunity." Norm claimed, "It's given me a greater appreciation for life, the cost of life." The reality for the men is that their dogs seem to ground them in the present, and the present for them is that they are older men who are reflecting on the value of life that is now at hand, and because that life is shared between themselves and their dog(s), they include their dogs in their reverence. What the men have shared here can arguably be many facets of the same construct. Words used by the men to describe their views of others' lives and their own, such as appreciation, respect, empathy and reverence for life, are the result of their relationships with their dog(s). The use of these descriptive words is telling because they elicit the idea that perhaps these men also recognize the implications of those words in describing their relationships with their dog(s). The meaning of their bonds could be derived from the thoughts and behaviors that are the outcome of that reverence for life. Because of their dog(s) the men are recognizing how they are able to manifest their thoughts and feelings toward life.

2). *Transcendent View of Their Own Aging*

A transcendent view of their own aging and mortality is apparent in the ways the men spoke of having empathy and patience for their aged dogs. Norm reflected on being an older adult dog owner and caring for his older dog, Lexi, in the final panel meeting when he said of aging and empathy,

> "Well the older you get the more you realize that time is closer for you and the pets…as you age you get more empathy for the animal, in the sense that you know what the aging process is yourself now, so you know what's going on with them."

This perspective is one that may be unique to older adult pet owners and it may benefit both the dog and the owner. For instance, it is possible that an older adult dog owner may have particular empathy for the physical difficulties of being on older dog. As a result, the owner may be especially accommodating to the needs of the dog in an attempt to make life easier for the older dog. Likewise, an older dog may be able to effect a new perspective of aging in their older adult owner if the owner is perspicacious enough to observe and empathize with the effects of time on the dog. This is what has occurred for the men in this study. David also spoke of empathy and aging saying,

> "I still think one can be empathetic, nothing like being older to experience the ravages of age. Being able to think 'gee if I'm feeling this, then my dog and partner is aging.' So maybe I should be a little more sympathetic or empathetic, anticipate some of their needs a little more based on how I'm feeling."

Norm's dog, Lexi is seven and David's dog, Woofy is 12. It is likely that the combination of being older adult men and sharing their lives with an aging pet dog has worked together to influence them to think about aging in this existential manner. These ruminations of their own aging and impermanence mostly arose when discussing dog loss that further emphasized the finite nature of their present life and the role of their dog(s) as

a presence in that life. This new appreciation for the role of the dog(s) has led to a new reverence for life and their own aging. Because of the interaction of the elements that culminates in a reverence for life and a new, transcendent view of their own aging, the men have developed an identity in older age that is directly linked to sharing their lives with their dogs.

An Emerging Identity

The outcome from the interaction of these elements is an emerging identity of self in old age as a result of being a dog owner. This new definition of self in old age is essentially the heart of the outcome of being an older adult pet owner. The men's identities have been changed not just as a result of their relationships with their dogs in later life, but because of the ways they have reflected on that relationship. They have expressed the effects of sharing their life with a dog and how they have thought about that relationship. John is an example of how his perspective of others' pain and struggles, including a dog's, has been changed as a result of some deeper thoughts about his dog, Ruby, after she had died. "I learned something about people because of Ruby. And I say in there [the essay he wrote about Ruby] I've never been around brokenness. You know people have broken lives all around. Some far worse than others. I had never known anyone who was not loved. And so my heart changed as a… well my time with Ruby." James has given much thought to his relationships with his dogs over his life span. My summation for James is that these relationships with his dogs have offered him a sort of compass with which to make his way down that "flowing river" of life of which he spoke so eloquently. Chip and David have become older men who pick up earthworms in order to save them from certain deaths. Warren has accepted his feelings for Peaches upon

opening his heart and home to her. These are just a few examples of the ways in which the men have associated their identities in older age with their relationships with their dogs. The development of their current identities as older adult male pet owners has been the result of multiple contextual factors that influence change in the relationships they share with their dogs over their life span.

The Model in Context

One must understand the full context in which this relationship has occurred throughout the life spans of the men in order to fully appreciate the complexities of the human-animal bond in later life. Two primary contextual factors affect the human-animal bond: events, defined as something that occurs to someone at a certain point in a life stage; and environment, defined as the social and cultural conditions and influences that in aggregate influence a person. Changes in the relationships the men shared with their dog(s) at earlier life stages influence the relationships they have with their current dog(s). The events and environment work together to develop the context that determines how each relationship is affected at each life stage. Events in childhood may include the death of the dog, divorce of parents and their environment may include school and home which may be situated within a rural or urban environment or both. Events in adulthood may be marriage, death of a family member, friend or the dog and having children and their environment may include work and home. In older adulthood events may be death of a dog, spouse or friend and retirement and their environment may be home, again situated within a rural or urban environment.

Childhood Events and Effect of Environment

The relationships between the men and their dogs when they were children was greatly affected by their living environment. If they lived on a farm, the men were used to being around a guard or herding dog. These dogs did not live indoors with the men's families but stayed outside. Norm's grandparents had dogs that he interacted with on the farm, "I was raised in a rural area, tobacco farming people from Kentucky. Like I say, when I was a kid, you kept a farm dog around or two, they lived outside. He might get in the house in the wintertime, but for the most part they live outside." Vernon feels that an outdoor dog is not treated or viewed the same as having a dog that lives indoors with the family. "I firmly believe that if you get a dog and you bring him into your house and he is a true family member, but the poor dog that is kept in the back yard or whatever, they have no interaction." Environment not only affected the men's physical interaction with the dog based on whether the dog was kept outdoors or indoors, but also their emotional connection with the dog, as dogs that were kept outdoors were in a sense, also kept on the periphery of the men's emotions.

The event of loss of a dog in childhood had a memorable and lasting effect on the men who experienced it. James' retelling of the grief of his loss of his dog, Biscuit, is a prime example of this. For these men, their relationship with their dog when they were children was defined more by the physical interactions they engaged in with the dog(s) such as playing with them or talking to them, which are arguably more innocent and intuitive interactions than thinking more analytically about the role of the dog in their lives as they do as adults. At this life stage, the men lived in the present and experienced their world through a lens of egocentricity that may not have allowed them the luxury of

the metacognitive processes that have led the men to deepen that bond with their dog in adulthood and old age.

Adulthood Events and Effect of Environment

As adults, the men's relationships with their dog(s) were affected by events such as getting married, having children and loss of a dog. Their environments affected them as well. Employment was part of their environment at this life stage. Five of the men are still employed full-time. They have formed emotional bonds with their current dog(s) despite the time constraints of their careers. If the men who are still employed follow along the path of the men who are now retired, it is likely that the bond will become even more significant for them after they retire although this may occur with a different dog other than the one(s) they now have. Norm is retired and reflected on how retirement affected his interactions with Lexi and Bear.

> "Now that we are retired, even though we stay busy, take a half hour and sit there and watch the dogs if they are doing something interesting. So, I may sit on the front porch for half an hour and watch the dog. It's interesting to me as I've got somewhat of a curious mind. Yes, it's nice to have the time. Not only do you have the time to watch the dog if you want to, and not have to do other things, you don't have to be somewhere at the same time every morning."

Half of the men were influenced by their spouse to adopt either their first dog, or another dog to add to a multi-dog family. What is interesting is that the dogs adopted at the behest of their wives often ended up being claimed by the men as "my dog." All of the men, with the exception of Chip and David, have biological children. Carter had to give a dog away when his wife had their child as the dog was aggressive and they were concerned for the safety of the child. Larry got a dog for his kids to teach them some

responsibility. Norm and Scott also obtained dogs for similar reasons, or to be a friend for their child.

At this stage in the men's lives the events and environment in which those events occurred affected the time available to spend on fostering relationships with their dog(s). The men were working full-time, getting married and having children. They spent time just "being with" their dogs and walked and played with them which led to a routine. This routine may have been important at this life stage for the men due to their management of careers, home and family and the dog(s). The men's thinking of the dog changed toward seeing them as family, which served to bring the dog(s) closer to them emotionally. At this time, the human-animal relationship was situated largely within the activities in which the men engaged with their dogs and the ways in which they thought about their dog(s).

Older Adulthood Events and Effect of Environment

Retirement has affected the human-animal relationship in several ways. The seven men who are retired are no longer focused on career-oriented goals and are not distracted by the responsibilities associated with employment. The temporal aspect of the relationship is changed considerably simply because the men have more time to spend with their dog(s). The absence of work responsibilities has allowed them to focus more on quality time spent with their dogs, or time just "being with" their dog(s). The seven retired men have been able to distance themselves from broader interactions with others that were required of them while employed full-time in career work. Presently, they have been able to make a mental transition and re-focus their energies on fostering their

relationships with their dog(s). The presence of the dog(s) in retirement has made the experience of the transition to and state of retirement a gratifying experience for the men.

The men in this research have lost multiple dogs over their lifetimes; some loss was planned through euthanizing the dog, while other loss was sudden and tragic. Vernon claimed that the manner in which he lost a dog affected his emotional reaction to the loss, but James felt that the emotional component of the loss is the same no matter how the loss occurred. Each loss of a pet dog the men experienced affected the bond they developed with subsequent dogs either by influencing the men to verbally tell the dogs they love them, to keep a closer eye on them, or by developing a deeper appreciation for what the dog(s) offer them in later life.

This model has considered the factors discussed throughout the dissertation that affect the men's attachments and subsequent emotional bonds with their dog(s). In section one of this chapter, I began by describing the three primary elements of the model-activities, originally discussed in chapter five; ways of thinking, discussed in chapter six; and loss dynamics discussed in chapter seven. Section two discussed the outcomes of the interaction of the elements which are a reverence for life and a transcendent view of one's own aging. The ultimate outcome of this interaction was an identity of themselves as related to being a dog owner. Section three discussed the effects of life course, originally discussed in chapter nine, on change in the model over the life spans of the men.

Chapter Eleven: Discussion

Research in the context of the human-animal bond relies on Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) to explain the outcomes and benefits of attachment to companion animals for those who care for them. What are lacking are: an explanation of the process of attachment to companion animals over the life course which this dissertation begins to address; the effects of context on attachment; and the meaning of attachment on the developing identities of older adult male dog owners. A phenomenological lens and life course perspective were used along with modified grounded theory methods to further investigate the meaning of attachment to dogs for older adult men. Findings indicate that the attachments that influence the emotional bonds these men have toward their current dog(s) are manifest and developed by three primary elements, each involving a series of individual domains. Attachment and the emotional bond that results are greatly affected by the events that occur in the men's life at different life stages and the environment in which those events occur. Findings also suggest that dog ownership is especially meaningful in old age due to the effects of events such as retirement and loss of a companion animal dog on self-reflection and development of identity as an older adult male dog owner.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the meaning older adult men ascribe to attachments they form with their dogs; to examine the relationships between life stage, life course and the progression and outcomes of attachment to companion animal dogs, and to move toward the development of a theory that provides a deeper understanding of the bond between older adult men and their companion animal dogs

than is currently available. The next section outlines how these questions were addressed through the key findings.

Summary of Key Findings

I first describe the basic foundation of the current relationship of the men with their dogs (chapter five) in terms of activities in which the men engage with their dogs: walking, playing, and "being with" them. An important consequence of these activities is the routine that the men establish with their dogs. This routine represents one manifestation of attachment to their dogs that develops into an emotional bond. Findings indicate that attachment to one's dog occurs through being in close proximity to one's companion animal and interacting with them in a physical manner. Once a routine is developed, the men and the dogs come to expect continuity and maintenance of the set routine.

In a second thematic chapter (chapter 6), I build on the activities the men engage in with their dogs and explore how attachment is manifest by the men's ways of thinking about the dog(s) and the effects of these ways of thinking on the development of an emotional bond. These domains of ways of thinking are; seeing the dogs as a member of the family; recognizing cross-species commonalities/anthropomorphizing; pack mentality; and responsibility. In support of this, it is frequently reported that companion animal owners view their companion animals as inclusive members of their families (Anderson, 2003; Huang Hickrod & Schmitt, 1982; Walsh, 2009). The validity, function and outcomes of humans' tendency to anthropomorphize has been looked at in great detail (Bartz, Tchalova & Fenerci, 2016; Mitchell & Hamm, 1997; Tam, Lee & Chao, 2013; Waytz, Cacioppo & Epley, 2010). As mentioned previously in the dissertation,

anthropomorphizing may be one mechanism that allows the men to feel that their dog is reciprocating affection. It is this reciprocity of perceived emotions and affections on the part of the dog that distinguishes between being attached to one's animal and developing an emotional bond with the animal. Very little research has been done on the idea of a pack mentality among male dog owners (Fox, 2006). This is the idea that the men see their companion animal dogs as being part of "a pack" and they would often anthropomorphize and say they felt their dog saw them as part of their pack. This idea was especially salient among the men in this study. The final domain under ways of thinking is a feeling of responsibility toward maintaining the dog's quality of life, which also lacks supportive research.

In a third thematic chapter (chapter seven) I look at the implications of attachment as manifest by the activities and ways of thinking about the dogs on the experiences of loss of a pet dog and the reactions from the men as a result of that loss. Pet loss is often referred to as a disenfranchised grief, one that does not receive the appropriate recognition that coincides with its emotionally detrimental effects to a pet owner (Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009). I begin with the men's stories of loss of previous pet dogs and follow with difficult decisions surrounding loss and the responsibility of making those decisions while considering the dog's quality of life. Loss of a pet is something all the men have experienced and choose to experience again as they all know their current dogs will likely die before them. This is followed by outcomes of loss and how loss has affected bonds with subsequent dogs and how loss has affected the men at a much deeper, emotional level. How their own old age has affected their views of loss is the final point

in this chapter. Old age has allowed the men to develop a sense of empathy for their aging dogs as well as a heightened awareness of their own impending demise.

The final thematic chapter (chapter eight) builds on the elements of attachment which are activities, ways of thinking, and loss dynamics, and describes how attachment to one's dog develops into an emotional bond. I end this chapter with a discussion of the emotional bond. The emotional bonds the men have developed with their dogs is the outcome of first being attached to them.

Chapter nine pulls the previous four thematic chapters together and explains the effect of life course on the manifestations and development of attachment that further develops into an emotional bond. During childhood pets are a playmate and a friend; during adulthood the men were influenced by their wives to obtain a dog and having children influenced whether they kept a dog or had to relocate the dog. Retirement was a significant factor for older adult men affecting their relationships with their dogs including offering them more time to spend with them and therefore adding to the emotional component of the bond for the men. The men's re-directed focus on their dogs after retirement can be supported by Carstensen's socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004), which claims that as people age they desire to focus on more emotionally rewarding relationships. It is clear from the men that they are finding much reward in the emotional bond they feel toward their dog(s) at this life stage.

The next chapter (chapter ten) considers all of the thematic chapters and the effect of life course on the human-animal relationship and describes it as a conceptual model that works toward the development of a theory of the human-animal bond. The elements

of the model are the essence of the model. They are activities, ways of thinking and loss dynamics. The intersection of the elements produces an appreciation for life. An outcome of this appreciation is the men having a reverence for life, meaning that they value all things living, including earthworms. E. O. Wilson claimed that humans are drawn to all living things due to a biological predisposition to care for and interact with other living organisms. In this way humans can address their mental, physical and psychological needs by interacting, being with and situated within nature. He referred to this innate need as his biophilia hypothesis (Kellert & Wilson, 1995). The theologian and philosopher Albert Schweitzer (Schweitzer, 2014) wrote extensively on the ethics of preserving one's reverence of life for all things. One of his many quotes is, "The essential thing is that we become more finely and deeply human." I argue that the men who participated in this study are presently at their most "finely and deeply human" due in part to the influence their dogs have had on their thinking about their present stage of life of being an older adult man. Time spent reflecting on their individual relationships with their dogs has led the men to contemplate some transformative realities including their own mortality and the importance of grace toward and awareness of their own and other's lives.

Another outcome of an appreciation for life is the men are expressing a transcendent view of their own aging and mortality. This is a unique perspective that may only appear in older adult pet owners. The men are appreciating the time they have left to live and the realization that they spend the majority of that time in the presence of their dogs. Reflecting on one's own aging is referred to as 'age identity' (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2005). The ideas of age identity and self-perceptions of aging are

extensively discussed in the literature, but most often as related to quality of life when nearing death (Kotter-Grühn, Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn, Gerstorf, & Smith, 2009; Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002). Except for the unfortunate loss of Larry to cancer, the remaining men do not appear to be nearing death, but they are contemplating the reality of it. Aging along with their dog(s) has assisted the men in accepting their own aging perhaps through the reality of having empathy for the dog(s). This empathy has created a new perspective of aging, a new understanding, that none escape the effects of time. The implications of being satisfied with one's aging self, appear to be related to longer life and increased health in older age (Levy et al., 2002).

The culminating effect of the relationship with their dogs is the men have embraced an identity of being older adult male dog owners and how this role has affected them. This finding of continuing to develop a sense of identity in older age as related to being an older adult dog owner is a direct contradiction to what Baltes (1987) and Birren (1988) found: that as individuals age, the losses they experience tends to outweigh any gains as a result of developmental growth. The men in this study seem to have addressed the realities of aging with a realistic perspective and managed to refrain from adhering to any negative connotations that may accompany many aging perspectives of self. The rest of this chapter situates the model in context over the life spans of the men to realize how the events the men have experienced in their lives and environment in which those events occurred, work together to influence the emotional bonds they currently share with their dogs. Attachment and the emotional bond is greatly affected by the events that occur in one's life at different life stages and the environment in which those events occur (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988).

The findings in this dissertation contribute to the research on an understudied demographic--older adult men who care for dogs. The complex interactions of attachment, the emotional bond, life course and old age that affect the human-animal bond that are presented here indicate that the human-animal bond is a bond that can be sustained throughout one's life into old age with great effects to the older adult pet owner.

Limitations

Two of the study's limiting factors are the small sample size as well as the reality that some of the participants are on the younger end of the young-old category. Participants who volunteered for the study were current dog owners who were passionate about the topic at hand therefore influencing them to take part in the research, both of which may result in a positive bias. The study lacks a multi-cultural, racial and ethnic perspective due to the homogeneity of the population of participants. I intentionally chose the men for the panels based on their ability to speak eloquently as I desired to gather rich data that went beyond surface level content. A sample of less educated men from more diverse socio-economic statuses would add a valuable perspective to this study. Finally, as with all research, the researchers themselves can influence findings in numerous ways. As a person who cares for multiple companion animals, I am aware of my own biases throughout the gathering of data. I attempted to bracket my biases and had to consciously do so many times. I also asked the men to "explain this to someone as if they have never cared for a pet" as I have cared for many to assist in their not making assumptions about my knowledge and experience of being a pet owner.

Conclusions

The older adult men in this study benefit from the relationships they share with their dogs. These relationships begin with a feeling of attachment toward their dog(s), and through anthropomorphizing, the men feel their dog(s) reciprocate their emotions, which enables the men to develop an emotional bond with them. The reciprocal nature of this relationship dynamic seems to be specific to the canine-human bond. For instance, the men believe that their dogs are capable of expressing what the men perceive to be emotion or affection toward the men, and this display of reciprocal emotions appears to stimulate the creation of an emotional bond between the men and the dogs. Therefore, the difference between attachment and emotional bonding is that developing an emotional bond is dependent on the men perceiving that the dog is reciprocating their affection. Without anthropomorphizing the men would not believe their pet dog had the ability to reciprocate emotions or affection. One participant in this study, Chip, asked, "Why does anthropomorphizing have to serve a purpose?" Its purpose is to enable the men to develop that bond which serves to then provide them with a rewarding relationship, one that they themselves claim cannot be found in another human being.

The men in this study claimed that the relationship they share with their dogs is "just different" than bonds they share with people and that that bond they share with their dogs cannot be found between themselves and another human. There is a large difference in the development of the human-canine bond and a human-human bond that makes the human-canine bond unique and rewarding for the men. For instance, an emotional bond that a parent or parent-figure develops with a child in infancy is developed with the knowledge that throughout the life span of that child, that bond will be re-directed toward

others throughout adolescence and adulthood in seeking out romantic and platonic relationships, whereas an emotional bond a person develops with their dog is consistent over the life span of that human-canine relationship and also requires a shorter commitment. Therefore, a dog's focus of bonding does not deviate from its owner over the life span of the relationship as long as that relationship is maintained. Dog owners also do not expect to launch their dog from their home as they do their children. These men have adopted their dogs and kept them and plan to do so until their death. There is a sense of commitment and assurance knowing that a dog will be there and will not likely leave. This is especially important for an older adult man who may have retired, whose children may have gone, and perhaps has lost a spouse. Having a dog to care for in later life can buffer some of the stress that accompanies events, transitions and losses by offering a sense of consistency and stability in a possibly tumultuous life stage.

Another way the bond is important is that it can offer an older adult man a sense of purpose, meaning, and an enhanced role of nurturer, after they disengage from their career environment. These men are enjoying the responsibility of caring for their dogs. This is clear in the efforts they put in to walking their dogs separately, taking them to the park and playing with them. For the men who are retired, it seems caring for dogs in this life stage is offering them the opportunity to foster the nurturing characteristics in themselves that they may not have been able to foster while engaged in their careers. It is possible that the men are more comfortable being nurturing at this life stage and the dogs provide them with an outlet to nurture. It is also likely that these men project their needs onto the dogs and through anthropomorphizing, they feel their dogs are able to meet their needs, whether it is the need for companionship, quietness, or an evening stroll.

Watching an older dog struggle with some of the physical effects that accompany aging, such as more difficulty jumping on the couch or bed and slower to get up after lying down, has influenced those men to be empathetic toward their aging pet and to experience compassion for their struggles, which in turn has made them have more compassion for their own aged selves. Losing a dog to death has led the men to appreciate the ways in which their previous dog(s) enhanced their lives. Losing their previous dogs and the presence of their current dogs has effected change in the men that may not have occurred if not for the time spent with their dog(s). This change in perspective is not only the result of time spent with dogs, but it is more so an effect of the ways the men have thought about the role the dogs play in their lives. Ultimately, it is how the men think about their dogs (family, part of a pack), how they think about the time spent with the dogs, and how the men think about the effect of the dog on their lives after the dog is gone, that has influenced this change in perspective.

Many of the men spoke of one particular dog as being "my dog" even if they had multiple dogs in the home. This dog was the one that was most frequently spoken of in the individual interviews as well as the panel discussions. It is interesting to see how much of the men's identities are connected to dog ownership and even more so considering the reciprocity factor of the bond as the dogs the men referred to as "my dog" were the ones to which they were most bonded.

It is very clear that the emotional bond some of these men developed with dogs who are now deceased have not been broken by the dog's death. John spoke primarily of his dog Ruby during our interview, even though she is gone and he currently has two dogs that are alive and well. He claimed that he would never experience the bond he had

with Ruby again, and this was very obvious simply by the absence of discussion of his present dogs. Even though all of the men had lost dogs to death and some are still grieving for those losses, they have not ceased to adopt and care for one or multiple dogs. The implications of the men's desire to care for dogs, despite living through the loss of previous dogs appear to be beneficial to their subsequent dogs as those losses have affected their perspectives of the value of life and the manner in which they think of their present relationships.

One of the most needed additions to the literature revealed in this study is the effects of the men's life courses on the attachments and bonds they develop with their dogs. The manifestations of attachment and meanings of the bonds are different depending on the events and environment that occur in the life stages of the men. This study focused on older adults and therefore the men's attachments and bonds with their dogs in their childhoods and adulthoods were not as thoroughly investigated.

Suggestions for Further Research

What would clarify the effects of life course even more thoroughly would be a study of younger men and adult men and the process of attachment and bonding with their dogs. This would offer a more comprehensive picture of what is going on in the life course at those life stages that affect the bond. Another possibility would be to investigate the effects that being a younger male dog owner who cares for an aging dog has on the younger man's perspectives of aging. This study has offered data into how an aging dog affects aging perspectives of older adult men, but a comparative study would further clarify how caring for an aging dog affects perspectives of one's own aging. The process of attachment and the emotional bonding to companion animals for older adult men in the

oldest-old (85+) category should also be studied as individuals in this oldest-old category are less likely to care for companion animals than younger individuals. Finally, as mentioned in limitations, a sample of men from lower SES backgrounds who are less educated, or who could not afford to retire to spend time with their dogs, would offer a clearer example of life course effects on the attachments and subsequent bond men can develop with a companion animal dog.

What would help clarify the specific nature of the human-canine bond would be an understanding of the extent to which dogs do feel the human emotions we impose upon them. Older adult men are more prone to taking their own lives than any other age group and sex. The loss of a spouse to death or compulsory retirement could be a precipitating factor of suicide. Forming emotional bonds with others has buffering effects on one's emotional, social and physical health throughout life. If all other bonds are broken, then perhaps forming an emotional bond with a dog could be used as an intervention strategy for those who are willing to attempt it. Perhaps a dog will be a new prescription for companionship. One could also look at how older men's relationships with dogs is changed based on who they are living with. What role do the partners play in shaping the men's attachment to their dogs? After all, the men's wives in this study influenced them to obtain a dog. And how does the bond with the dog then affect the human-human relationship? To what extent are older men concerned with injuring themselves as a result of falling or tripping over a dog? None of the men in this study mentioned injury, but it is a reality of pet-keeping. Another area that needs further investigation is into what is absent in the relationship between people and their companion animals that makes the bond a significant relationship for those who choose

to care for them. An example of what is absent that a few of the men mentioned is the animal's inability to judge them or to speak to them. These are qualities the men felt were inescapable realities of human/human relationships that hinder their ability to be their authentic selves and to be genuine and entirely comfortable being genuine and authentic in human relationships. A result of this lack of judgment and speaking ability on the part of their companion animals is that the men more easily anthropomorphize by feeling that their dogs love them unconditionally.

This study probed deeper into older adult men's relationships their dogs in order to understand the attachments and subsequent emotional bond that develops and the effects of context on that development with the hope of moving toward a conceptual model of the human-animal bond. The men revealed that they have been changed regarding their appreciation for life and the role of the dog in their lives. Presently, their reverence for life has affected an unknown quantity of earthworms. It is difficult to project how many others will be saved. This was one outcome of the bond that has also affected the lives of others known to the men and one that will arguably affect the men for the rest of theirs.

Epilogue

"Dogs are our link to paradise. They don't know evil or jealousy or discontent. To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing was not boring--it was peace." Milan Kundera

Milan's quote nicely summarizes what I believe is the essence of the human-animal bond, specifically, the bond one shares with their dog. It speaks of the purity of a dog's heart and how sitting with a dog and simply being with them has profound effects on the human spirit. His use of such language as "paradise," "peace," and "Eden" are all fashioned by the mind's eye as a result of visualizing the relationship between a person

and their dog. It is easy to envision an older man, or perhaps oneself, on this hillside with a dog because this relationship is so ubiquitous, yet it is still so difficult to comprehend and articulate its enduring power, meaning and influence on one's identity. I feel the men who participated in this study have been most articulate as well as gracious and altogether at their utmost human through sharing with me the meaning and truths that is their bonds with their dogs.

APPENDICES

Appendix A-Individual Interview Guide

1). Tell me about your current pet(s).

2). Why do you choose to keep dogs?

3). Has the dog(s) played a different role depending on your life stage?

4). Do you think there are difficulties with caring for dogs?

5). Do you remember as a child what your relationship was like with dogs?

6). How is your relationship with your pets changed over time?

7). How does that (retirement, if retired) then affect your relationship with the dogs?

8). The role that you play as a (husband, father, child, business owner), how do all of those affect the relationship you have with the dogs at that time?

9). What does this relationship mean to you to have them in your life?

10). Tell me about your history of caring for pets…. (from earliest memory of pets through today).

11). How does the word "Attachment" resonate with you when you think about the bond with pets?

12). We spoke of your history with pets from as far back as you could remember through today. Let's chat about events or transitions that have affected your relationships with your pets and perhaps the attachment you feel toward them then and now.

- How has the attachment to pet(s) changed from when you were younger compared to now?
- What life events may have influenced that change?
- How do you see your attachment to your pet(s) changing as you age into the future?

Appendix B-Demographic Form

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

Date: _____

Age: _____

Name: _____

Number of pets you currently take care of:
_____

Breed or type of dog, sex of dog and age of dog:
_____

How long have you had your current dog(s)?
_____

How many dogs have you taken care of over your life-span?

How old were you when you had your first dog?
_____

What types of dogs have you taken care of before?
_____

Do you own your own home, rent, or live with family or friends?
_____

When you think about the word "family" do you consider your dog?
_____

What is/are the name of your dog(s)?
_____

What is the highest level of education you have completed? Please check one

High School_____

GED_____

Undergraduate Degree_____

Graduate Degree _____

How would you describe yourself? Please check one.

Caucasian_____

African American_____

Asian_____

Native American_____

Hispanic_____

Latino_____

Multiracial_____

Other_____

Prefer not to say_____

How long have you lived in Kentucky? _____

Do you live in an area characterized as?

Rural_____

Urban_____

Suburban_____

What is your current marital status? Please check one.

Married_____

Divorced_____

Never married_____

Separated_____

Widowed_____

Living with another_____

Would rather not say_____

Single_____

Income bracket: Check one

0-15,000_____

15,001-25,000_____

25,001-40,000_____

40,001-55,000_____

55,00-70,000_____

70,001 + _____

Email address, phone number or easiest way to contact you:

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